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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[UNDER HIS SPELL.]

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

CHAPTER X.

"MORELY, will you do me a kindness?" asked Brenda Farquhar, as she knelt by the side of the elderly spinster, and looked up into her faded face with bright, beseeching eyes.

"With the greatest of pleasure," she answered, cordially; "but what can I do for you, my darling? It seems to me that I'm past everything but receiving kindness from others."

"Indeed you are not," indignantly. "What I should do without you I really don't know. Will you come and live in a little house with me, all alone? Would you find it very dull?"

"My dear, it would be paradise!" and Miss Moreland drew a long breath. "But whatever do you mean? Sir Eric would never consent to it."

"I shan't ask his consent!" tossing up her head; "and, if he doesn't like it, he must do

the other thing. He won't find that he has got a meek little lamb to deal with; and if he opposes me in everything, I shall write to my mother, and ask her to give me another guardian. But, listen, Morely; wouldn't it be nice to have a dear little house, with a love of a garden, full of roses and carnations, three or four servants, and no one to bother us at all?"

"Very nice, indeed, my dear! I could fancy being as happy as the day is long. But it can't be!" with a sigh, like that of a child looking at forbidden fruits inside a window. "Sir Eric has other plans for you, and he'll never allow it. And, pray, be careful, my dear!" seeing an expression of great wrath pass over the young, eager face. "He is not a man to be trifled with. I could almost fancy being afraid of him myself!"

Brenda laughed, for she thought the little spinster might probably be afraid of her own shadow. As for Eric, with his imposing appearance and masterful ways, she really thought that he might have crushed her with a look.

"I'm afraid of nobody!" she said, with her

chin in the air. "If he doesn't treat me properly I should be equal to starting off all by myself to go to my mother."

"My dear child, remember that Lady Sophia is in Vienna, and she would die if she were told that her daughter was coming to her alone and unattended over those many miles of land and sea."

"It would take more than that to kill my mother," with a sagacious little nod, "as far as I can guess. But, Morely, dear, stand by me. I can't be left here with Eric. I don't know what it is makes me dread it so, but he has such a power over people, and if he got it over me where should I be?"

Miss Moreland looked up into the beautiful flushed face with a pathetic glance, for the thought crossed her mind that the girl whom she had loved like a child of her own, would have perils and dangers to go through from which her own maidenly purity and unflinching courage would only be able to protect her, and that she herself would have no more power to assist her than a babe in arms.

"Brenda, my darling, as long as I'm alive," she said, tremulously, "you can come to me



whenever you want me; but, for the sake of your poor old friend, never do anything rash. The world is always so hard on women!"

"Ah, but a woman has power of her own; and, tell me, Morely," blushing rosy red, "am I terribly conceited to think myself nice-looking?"

Miss Moreland, being an impulsive little woman, threw her arms round the girl's neck, and cried, enthusiastically,—

"Child, there's nobody like you in all the country round, and with one look from your bonnie eyes you could make half the men mad about you!"

"You dear old thing, you are talking nonsense! You always loved me a great deal too much!" caressing the faded cheeks with her small hands, "and when you're gone I shan't have a soul to care for me. Cyril's deserted me—"

"Don't say that!" interrupting her quickly. "It nearly broke his heart to go; the tears were in his eyes—bless him!—and he said so earnestly,—

"Watch over Bren for me. She'll have nobody but you to turn to now."

Brenda turned away her face, and said nothing.

Presently Miss Moreland gathered up her work, and took off her spectacles.

"Where are you going to?" Brenda asked, in surprise.

"I quite forgot that Sir Eric asked me to go and see some people in Blythe Cottage. I think he said that some little boy named Willie had broken his arm."

"Poor Willie! What? Why didn't he tell me? I hadn't heard a word about it," drawing her brows together, for the boy was a special favourite, having been for some years the best scholar in her class at the Sunday-school. "We will go together, and I'll ask Mrs. Giddon to give me something nice for him."

Not long after the two sallied out together, Brenda, in her deep mourning, lowering over the little spinster, in her neat black bonnet and mantle.

Miss Moreland was charged with a bunch of flowers from the conservatory, whilst Miss Farquhar carried a basket in which were sundry things which she thought would be appreciated, such as a bottle of wine, a dozen fresh eggs, a custard pudding, &c.

They walked at a brisk pace over the soft turf and the young shoots of bracken, startling the deer from their lair and the comical little rabbits from their games of play.

It was a beautiful day, with a promise of summer in the softness of the air and the fulfilment of spring in the blossoms.

The lilacs and laburnums in the gardens were just showing a touch of colour, the thorns scattered about the park were bursting into bloom, whilst the bluebells were like "heaven upbreking through the earth," and the primroses in their spotless innocence were bright and sweet as a baby's smile.

There was something so contagious in the brightness of nature that Brenda's spirits rose with the elasticity of youth.

The strange sense of foreboding which had oppressed her ever since the day of Cyril's sudden departure passed away, and her own brave hopeful spirit took its place.

She would have enjoyed seeing the blank look of disappointment on Sir Eric's face when he opened the door of the morning-room, and found it empty.

He had planned the expedition to the Blythe Cottage on purpose to get Miss Moreland out of the way, meaning to have a talk with Brenda during her absence.

Being cheated out of his one little scheme, he ordered his horse, and started out for another.

He was not in love with anyone except himself, and, perhaps, one other; but yet he was bored by his own society.

He could not get on with any of the men in the neighbourhood, who could talk of nothing

that interested him, and in their turn dubbed him, contemptuously, "the foreigner."

On the other hand, he had no resources in himself, and unless he were busy with neglected accounts, or managed to get somebody to play billiards with him, he could find nothing to do in his own home but to lounge on a sofa reading a French novel and smoking a cigarette.

He rode through the park, glancing right and left with moody eyes, grumbling at the deer, who were exceedingly busy nibbling the tender young shoots on the trees; or swearing at a white rabbit, which seemed to tumble head over heels across the road on purpose to make his horse shy.

Presently a small figure appeared on the dusty high-road, when he had passed through the large gates of the park, over which two stone pillars watched from the top of white pillars, as if waiting to spring on some passer-by. The tiger was the Farquhar's crest, and by a few ill-natured people it had been considered especially appropriate to many members of the family.

But Sir Eric looked as gentle and harmless as a typical lamb, as he made Crookedfoot quiver his pace, and then pulled up rather suddenly by the side of Flossie Whitehead. She was dressed in simple grey from head to foot, which suited her fair complexion, and a basket with a few trifles in it hung over her arm.

A wild thrill of pleasure darted through her heart as her innocent eyes looked up into the handsome face above her. The next moment Sir Eric was leaning beside her, with his hat in his hand, his glowing glance fixed on her blushing face.

"You haven't managed to get many flowers, Miss Whitehead?" he said, in his slow, lazy voice. "There are thousands of bluebells the other side of the fence. Why do you look for them in this dusty road?"

"Because I had no time to go into the fields," still blushing painfully, and not daring to look up.

"But there was the park."

"Yes; but everyone else's go there."

"The park is mine—is that against it?"

"No."

"I can't let you go home with that empty basket; it would be quite a disgrace to the place. You shall come into the park."

"No," looking frightened. "I really haven't time."

"And I have too much. Besides, it's the shortest way home."

"Oh, Sir Eric! how can you?" opening her eyes, but still not looking at him.

"It is, if you cut right across the grass."

He got his way, as he generally did with women. He gave his horse to one of the grooms who happened to pass along the road at the time, and, unhooking a gate in the fence, led Flossie out of the glare and the dust into the sweet refreshing shade under the trees.

The park seemed like Paradise to her delighted eyes, with its deep shadows, and long shafts of golden light, its sunny glades, and billowy waves of young ferns, stirred gently by the breeze. If it were Paradise, the serpent was very near—as near as to Eve in the first sweet purity of womanhood—and though Flossie was happier than she had ever felt before, with the happiness mixed the stings of an uneasy conscience, for well she knew that she was doing wrong.

She exclaimed with delight at the sea of bluebells; but as soon as she had gathered a large bunch Sir Eric made her sit down to tie them up. They sat together on a fallen trunk, he watching every changing expression of the pretty face, as if it were some inanimate portrait which could not be confused by his lingering gaze, wondering at her evident simplicity as he talked to her in his softest tones, and speculating coolly how far she would let him go, now that he had got her so remorselessly under his spell.

A flirtation with the doctor's daughter would help to pass the time, only he must let no one

"suspect it, for it would be awkward" if the father "cut up rough" about it, and made a fuss. Sir Eric was prudent, and never said one word that could not have been shouted from the house-tops; but his eyes spoke more eloquently than his tongue, and his manner gave a special import to his words. And poor little Flossie had never seen anyone so charming before.

CHAPTER XI.

"PROMISE me, Miss Whitehead, that you will come to the park whenever you want some flowers," and Sir Eric held the small hand rather longer than was necessary, as he looked down into the pretty face where the colour was coming and going like April sunshine. "It will be a kindness to pick them instead of letting them die on their stalks."

"You are very kind," drawing away her hand; but I don't know if my father will let me."

"What possible reason could there be against it?" a certain hauteur in his voice. "Supposing your worthy parent took it into his head not to appreciate me, should I infect the flowers?"

"Oh, Sir Eric! how can you talk like that? Papa certainly knows you—you've been so much away," she answered, quickly, feeling as if she would die of shame, because he had gone so near the truth.

"Yes, I've been away, and no one missed me because I had a cousin who filled my shoes so nicely. Did you see much of him?"

"Oh, very often—riding past with Miss Farquhar. They used to look so happy, as if they had nothing left to wish for. But I'm so late. Good-bye, and thank you ever so much, Sir Eric."

She hurried away down the dusty road, but she turned back into the cool green shade, and shut the gate behind him. Flossie was thinking of Sir Eric as she put her flowers into water, as she sat opposite to the doctor at the top of the table, as she played dreamy music on the cottage piano; and when she laid her fair head on the pillow the glances of his eyes still haunted her, and the tones of his voice were ringing in her ears; whilst he—just like a man to whom flirtation is a pastime, and nothing more—quite forgot the fact of Flossie Whitehead's existence as soon as she had disappeared from his sight, but one little sentence which had fallen from her lips fretted his temper.

He could not bear the thought that Brenda looked as if she had nothing left to wish for when riding with his cousin. A wild jealousy of Cyril had sprung up in his heart; and there was plenty of food for it in his surroundings. Brenda loved him; the servants ran to do his bidding as if it were a pleasure to serve him—all the tenants were devoted to "Master Cyril."

Sir Eric cut fiercely at a tall thistle as he passed, and a dark look came into his eyes, as if he would have liked to deal with his cousin as with a noxious weed. It was nothing to be master in his own house if another man were really more powerful; it was but little satisfaction to let his tenants off paying the full measure of their rents if this other man had stolen their hearts. This state of things must be remedied at any cost.

The first step had been taken. Cyril was away, and would easily be forgotten. Brenda remained, and through the exercise of a little diplomacy Lady Sophia had placed her completely in his power. Her pride wanted tampering, and he felt equal to the task.

A pleasurable excitement would come to his life in the effort to bring her in subjection to his will. His own was a strong one, and he had never exerted it in vain over any woman. It was not likely that he would fall with an unsophisticated girl, completely isolated from the rest of her relations. He would dearly like to see her proud eyes droop, her resolute

lips quiver, her pride sink gradually under an irresistible charm.

But when he had conquered, what would be the end? Not such a tame conclusion as a marriage between two cousins who had been brought up together as children. There could be nothing so slow as that. Just the sort of thing that would happen in a story-book for good little children, but which would never suit him.

Brenda should be conquered; Cyril should be cut out, and then by the next train he would start for the sunny South, or wherever he would be most likely to find a certain lady with yellow hair, who had fascinated him more than any other woman in the world.

He gave a short laugh as he thought of the disappointment, the indignant surprise, which he would leave behind him; but he checked himself abruptly. The laugh died away on his lips, the colour fled from his cheeks, his breath came in short gasps.

He was passing under some trees where the shadow was so dense that it made a darkness on the brightest day of summer. But there was something worse than the darkness—a sudden chill that froze the young blood in his veins.

He staggered, and by a strong effort of his will cast one frightened look over his left shoulder.

Was it fancy, or did he really see a strange-looking figure standing at his elbow? He could not be certain, for as he stared with wide-open eyes and stiffened lids the figure seemed to melt into nothingness, and he found himself gazing stupidly at nothing more awe-striking than a bramble-bush!

He drew a deep breath, and passed his hand across his forehead. Had he been dreaming? "What an utter idiot I am," he exclaimed, impatiently, "to be frightened at my own shadow!"

He walked with a brisk pace to the verge of the wood, and emerged into the broad daylight with a shiver.

As soon as he reached home he called for a brandy-and-soda, and ordered the library fire to be lighted.

Brenda found him standing on the hearth-rug, and holding out his hands to the blaze as if it were the depth of winter, when she came in, flashed with exercise.

"Are you cold?" she asked, in surprise. "I thought it quite delicious out-of-doors, and the air was as soft as summer."

"No doubt you did; but you're accustomed to this confounded climate, and I'm not. I wish to goodness I could be off to-morrow," with an impatient glance towards the window, like that of a bird confined in a cage.

"Pray don't let me detain you," she said, with a mock bow.

"I believe you want to get rid of me," and his eyes flashed.

"When I do, I can go away."

"Can you? I doubt it. Do you know of any particular household which is ready to receive you with open arms?"

Brenda flushed at the implied sneer, for her own isolated position was a great grief to her mind.

"I know of one person who would be ready to receive me with the heartiest welcome possible," she said, defiantly.

"Dear me! This one person may be very convenient if I ever have to go away in a hurry. May I ask if the person is Miss Moreland?"

"Of course it is. Is there anyone else?" she answered, with a sort of impatient bitterness. "And oh! Eric, I have something to ask you," she added, eagerly. "You will make me so happy if you will only consent."

"Don't ask me now; we shan't have five minutes to ourselves," he said, hastily. "But it's off to ten o'clock, when the estimable Morely retires to bed."

"But I generally go too."

"Not to bed, I'm sure; you like to have a quiet time to yourself, to dream of impossibilities. You shall vary it to-night, for you

shall sit up with me, and we will discuss possibilities instead. There, that's decided," he said, in his most imperative manner, which always raised a feeling of opposition in Brenda's mind.

"I think to-morrow morning will do better in every way," she answered, coldly. "As there has been such a fuss about my having a chaperon I had better stick to her like a leech."

"You foolish creature! Don't you see that if you want to get anything out of me you must let me choose my own time?"

There was so much sense in this observation that Brenda yielded at once, being much more determined to get her own way than to please the Mrs. Grandys of the neighbourhood.

Sir Eric was very grave during dinner, and looked so pale that Miss Moreland's gentle heart was moved with compassion. She kept giving furtive glances in his direction, which amused Brenda immensely, for she knew that the little spinster was summoning up all her courage in the fervent desire to recommend one of her favourite remedies for his benefit.

Presently out she came with it, getting quite pink in the face and husky in the voice as she said, boldly,—

"You are not looking well, Sir Eric. If you are suffering from a nervous headache I have a capital prescription, which cured the Lord Chancellor and the Archbishop of Canterbury!"

"Much obliged; but what on earth put it into your head that my nerves were out of order?" looking highly offended. "I'm not a Lord Chancellor nor an Archbishop, and nobody could say I had over-worked my brain. It's this place which gives me the blues. I believe it will be the death of me," leaning back in his chair.

"Oh! Eric, and we always love it so!" exclaimed Brenda, the quick blood rushing to her face. "What a pity that it was ever left to you if you hate it!"

"You would have arranged it differently I haven't a doubt," with an evil look in his eyes. "I know who it is who would have been master of the house and of everything in it if you had been consulted. But, happily, our poor grandfather—"

He stopped abruptly; some horrid flash of memory forcing him to leave the sentence unfinished, whilst his cheeks grew ashen pale.

There was an uncomfortable pause, broken by Brenda. She looked across at Miss Moreland, who had never recovered from the snub to her beloved prescription, and proposed an adjournment to the drawing-room.

As she linked her arm lovingly within her old friend's she lowered her voice, and said, very seriously,—

"Do you know, sometimes the wickedest thoughts come into my mind?"

"May I inquire if they are about me?" asked Sir Eric's voice, close behind her.

Brenda started violently, and exclaimed, crossly,—

"I wish you wouldn't steal upon us like a detective. I hate it!"

"So sorry; I'll buy a trumpet, and have it blown before me; or, better still, never move without your permission," he said, coolly; and then he added, in a caressing tone, "I'm so bored by my own society. Play me something to chase away the blues."

Brenda, not having quite recovered from the shock he had just given her, went meekly to the piano, and played for most of the evening; whilst Sir Eric, with an apology to Miss Moreland, stretched himself on a sofa, and appeared to listen with rapt attention. But as he shut his eyes, and clasped his hands behind his head, his thoughts went flying far away to the South, where Lillian Wyndham was at that moment playing an exciting game of baccarat with the well-known Lord Stormoway.

Had she forgotten that parting under the orange trees, when she picked a small cluster of the typical blossoms, and told him to keep it till they met again?

CHAPTER XII.

PRECISELY as the clock struck ten Miss Moreland folded up her work, and made her usual little speech.

"Don't you think it is time to go to bed?"

Sir Eric roused himself at once.

"Don't let us keep you, Miss Moreland, but Brenda must not stop playing just yet. She is exorcising an evil spirit, and you would not interrupt such a good work I am certain."

Before she had time to show any surprise he lighted her candle, and politely opened the door. At the last moment Brenda got up from the piano, and, running after her to give her a kiss, said,—

"Good night, you dear old darling! I shan't be long."

"Now, come and talk to me," said Sir Eric, motioning Brenda to a seat on the sofa, and taking his place beside her. "What is it you want to get out of me?"

"Only this!" clasping her hands and looking straight up into his handsome face with her glorious eyes. "Let me go and live with Morely in a nice little house all to myself, till my mother comes home. It would be delicious!"

"Impossible. You're only wanting a house of your own in order that the spare-room may be filled by Cyril. My dear child, that can't be!"

"Eric, how dare you say so?" her bosom heaving, her cheek flushing crimson.

"It doesn't require much courage, or much discernment either. You were fancying a garden filled with flowers, and under the roses you were always walking with that boy by your side. No, Brenda, as long as you are under my care that can never be. My duty to Lady Sophia won't allow it."

"Eric, listen; let me go. I shall be quite happy and contented all alone with Morely. I don't want another soul. But, oh! you don't know what it is to me to live here, when all is so different to what it used to be. It seems like a miserable parody of the old life," her eyes filled with tears, her pretty mouth quivering.

Eric looked at her, and an uncanny demon rose in his heart. She was beautiful—beautiful as an artist's dream, and his pulses quickened, and his eyes glowed.

"You shall have another sort of life soon, dear. There shall be women to be jealous of you; and men to worship you," leaning over her till she could feel his breath on her forehead, and insidiously draw back. "You shall live a life worth having, and not be buried alive in a moth-eaten grave. Only you must wait a little while. If we begin too soon we shall have the neighbourhood up in arms, and crying shame."

"I don't want that sort of life at all," a look of repugnance crossing her face. "I don't want to be made vain, and conceited, and worldly. I should like to do as much good as I could to all about me, and when I die I hope there will be somebody to cry for me, and that I shan't be sorry to go."

"You poor, little, simple child," said Eric, wonderingly, feeling that whilst he pretended to despise her simplicity, that she was, in reality, far above him. "One would think you were a parson's daughter, brought up on bread-and-scraps and her father's sermons. At all events, I take it for granted that you wish to be happy."

"Happy! Of course. I've always been happy till lately," a sudden cloud coming over the brightness of her expression.

"I will make you as happy as I can, on one condition. Do you know that you are in my power for two years?"

"Not a bit of it," throwing back her head proudly. "You are to see that no harm comes to me, that's all. Otherwise I am my own mistress."

"Nothing of the kind," he exclaimed, angrily. "You've got to submit to me in every thing; and, if you won't, I'll be hanged if I don't make your life a hell upon earth!"

"If you do," her indignation at white heat, "I shall run away."

"Then I shall run after you; and if I do that there will be a report in the neighbourhood that we have eloped, and you will force me to marry you in order to save your character."

"Marry you!" she cried, breathlessly. "I'd rather be skinned alive!"

"And I would rather die; it would be much less bother. And now, having expressed our sentiments with the utmost politeness, I will just tell you my programme. To-morrow I go away (Brenda gave a gasp of relief), and leave you here with Miss Moreland. Miss Moreland will be mistress of the house, and give orders in my name."

"I should like to see her! Both Seddon and Markham make her tremble in her shoes."

"She'll have to get accustomed to them. About the middle of August I shall return, and bring my aunt, Lady Manville, with me, who will be your chaperon for the future," watching her face narrowly, to see what effect this announcement had.

Unmitigated astonishment was visible in her wide-open eyes and parted lips.

"Lady Manville!" she exclaimed, in surprise. "What does she know about me?"

"Very little, except that you are my ward, and I wish you to make a good match."

"Don't talk like that; I hate it!" with an impatient frown.

"You hate it because you are sentimental, and sentimentality is frightfully behind the age. Get rid of it as if it were the small-pox. There's nothing so dangerous for a girl with a small fortune of her own."

"I'm not sentimental," indignantly. "I—I'm only womanly."

"Womanly! when it is every girl's ambition to be as like a man as possible. My aunt will soon knock all that nonsense out of you, for it wouldn't go down with my set, I can tell you."

"I am not likely to come across your set," very proudly, as her thoughts flew back to the uncomfortable reports which had reached her ears of the sort of people he chose for his friends in the Riviera.

"The Towers will be filled with my friends during August and September, and you'll have the goodness to be civil to them," pulling his monocles fiercely.

"That will depend upon what they are like," drawing up her white throat, whilst her long lashes rested disdainfully on the softness of her cheeks.

"You will be civil to them because they will be my friends, and under my roof," with great decision. "If I chose to send you down to dinner with the varicose blackleg that ever disgraced the turf you should go, because I mean to show you that in every detail of your life I am your master for two years."

"My master you shall never be, that I can tell you," springing up from the sofa, and standing before him with flashing eyes. "I would rather be a shopwoman and work for my bread!"

Eric rose slowly from his seat, his eyes fixed on her flushed face. Splendidly handsome she looked in her fiery independence, and the longing to master her grew stronger than ever.

"If you will not bend you shall break," he said, between his set teeth. "I will conquer somehow. Before I've done with you I will see your pride lowered to the dust, and you yourself grovelling at my feet in abject submission!"

There was such an evil expression in his face that she shrank back as she would have done if Lucifer incarnate had appeared before her. As she shrank he gave a short, unpleasant laugh.

"You should not excite me," he went on in an altered tone. "I am a perfect demon when roused."

"You looked it," she answered, disdainfully; and I am sorry I stayed." Turning her

back on him with an angry sweep of her skirts, she went towards the door.

"Wait," he called out, imperatively. "You haven't said good-night!"

She did not answer, only quickened her steps, pride alone preventing haste from degenerating into a run.

With a few strides of his long legs he soon placed himself in front of her. He was desperately angry with her; but her beauty, as she stood there with heaving bosom, and eyes bright with unshed tears, was too much for him. He placed his two hands on her shoulders, though she tried at once to shake them off, and his face softened rapidly.

"Good-night, child," he said, with a smile hovering about his lips, his mocking eyes looking straight into hers, "you are far too lovely to quarrel with." Then he stooped his head and kissed her cheek in spite of her passionate efforts to prevent him. "I am your guardian and your cousin," he said, coolly; "and every night and morning I shall kiss you. That will be my rule, so don't make a fuss about it!"

Without deigning to answer him she fled from the room in a perfect whirlwind of indignation.

Like an angry tigress she paced up and down her own bedroom, whilst the wildest thoughts flashed through her brain. In her excitement she was ready for any action, however desperate; and the only fact that stood like a double-barred door in her path was Sir Eric's departure the next day.

For more than two months she could be in perfect peace with Miss Moreland, and it would certainly be too bad to prevent the poor old governess from having such a pleasant time of rest. But before he came back with his troop of ungodly friends she would make her plans and develop them.

First of all, she would appeal to Lady Sophia Fullerton—that far-off mother—who, when she married a second husband, seemed to lose all interest in the child she had had by her first.

She sat down to her dainty writing-table—one that Cyril had given her on her last birthday, and began to write with a hand that still trembled with rage.

She wrote a passionate appeal, expressed in rather extravagant language, which she thought no mother on earth could resist. Life with Sir Eric was impossible. He was so detestable and domineering; that if she continued to be his ward he would drive her to something desperate. She did not wish to be allowed to come to Vienna, where, perhaps, she would not be wanted; but she begged and prayed for permission to live in a small house of her own, under the chaperonage of her dear old friend Miss Moreland. There she would be perfectly content, and her mother should never be worried with a grumble.

Having finished the letter, she felt more at ease in her mind, and as soon as she got into bed she fell into the restful sleep of youth.

Sir Eric smiled when he saw the letter lying on the hall-table the next morning. The bold characters of the address were rather straggly, as if written under the influence of great excitement, and he knew the contents as well as if he had read them.

He did not abstract it or open it, as bad men so often do in books; but he wrote what he called an antidote to it.

"She has called me a brute, so I'll write like a guardian angel," he said to himself, as he shut himself in his private study. "She shall be a dear, wilful girl, who is angry with me simply because I am doing my duty in guarding her from an imprudent marriage. I would willingly do anything for her happiness, but I know that if I gave into her wish to live in a cottage with Miss Moreland, the very man from whom I am anxious to protect her would be there every hour of the day. That will do for Lady Sophia, and smash Brenda's little game into shivers. How splendid the girl looked last night! If it weren't for Lillian Wyndham I could almost have fallen in love

with her myself! And wouldn't the Ambassador's wife give her eyes to have me for a son-in-law!"

He went away by the twelve o'clock train, and Brenda's spirits rose up with a bound.

She had no quarrel with her governess about being mistress of the house, for the servants all came to Miss Farquhar for orders, as if Sir Eric had given no directions to the contrary.

It was a pleasant, peaceful time, and the little old maid enjoyed it thoroughly, and told Brenda again and again that she felt at least ten years younger.

With a slight twinkle in her eye she ventured one evening to suggest that it would be very nice to have Mr. Cyril down, and it was a shame that he should lose all the fishing.

"So it is," said Brenda, with shining eyes. "I can't write to him, but you can. It will seem the most natural thing in the world."

She took care that Miss Moreland should not forget, and when the letter was written, she posted it herself; but, alas! the sunny days went by, and there was no answer, for the letter was lying unopened at the Carlton Club.

(To be continued.)

MY LADY OF THE LAKE.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I SHALL NEVER LEAVE LAKE ST. ORMO ANY MORE; MY DREAM OF HAPPINESS IS QUITE, QUITE OVER!"

POOR MAY walked with hasty steps, and a wildly-beating heart, through the town, carried on by the tumult of her feelings. The husband she had married only a few days before—whom she had loved with all the strength of her warm young heart—had cast her off for ever, and had proved by his cruel conduct that he never had, in reality, cared for her at all, and that his marriage with her had been purely and entirely of a speculative nature.

Poor proud May! It was, indeed, a blow for a Dalkeith; and the pain was made worse by self-condemnation.

May was learning wisdom from very bitter experience, and she saw how dangerous had been her trust in, and her intimacy with, this stranger, of whom she actually knew nothing. And with her anger was mingled a feeling of shame, which brought the hot blood in a crimson flood to her cheeks; but when it had reached them it quickly receded, as though the life-blood had left her heart, so pale and wan did she become.

She had forgotten to replace her veil, and the policeman, whom she passed a second time, wondered who she could be, as he had never seen her until that morning; but the multifarious duties of his daily routine soon expunged May from his memory.

As soon as she got clear of the town her footsteps began to flag, but she struggled on bravely, although more than once she had to stop and rest by gate or hedge to let the deadly faintness pass away which so cruelly oppressed her.

She was hit hard, and the mind was acting on the body; still, she knew the deep necessity there was for her getting home before her father should be about.

She felt that she would know by her face what she had been doing; and she would, indeed, have been ashamed that he should even guess how she had humbled herself, only to be insulted and spurned.

She had gone, not because she any longer desired to be with Guy, but because she believed that it was her duty—believed that it was right; but now she could not even comfort herself with that reflection, and thought her instinct had erred, and that she had done wrong in seeking a man who, her father had told her, desired not to see her again.

She ought to have believed her father. She acknowledged it now; but still, after all, perhaps, it was as well that she should know the extent of Guy's treachery, so that she might be able some day to join in his belief that it "was best as it was."

That walk home was, indeed, a sad and weary one for poor May. Undertaken by fits and starts, just as she could manage it; resting when she found it impossible to proceed, running and walking in turns when she could get on; faint, sick, and bitterly weary both in mind and body; yet pressing on, borne up by the need for action, and the power of her will, she had hoped to get home unobserved by anyone; but when she came in sight of the entrance gate Mrs. Wheeler was there, looking both up and down the road with an anxious face, and when she perceived May she ran to meet her.

"Oh! Miss May, thank Heaven, you have come!" she cried, excitedly. "I have, indeed, been frightened about you! My dearie, where have you been? and how tired you do look!"

The weary girl laid her hand upon the shoulder of her humble friend.

"Wheeler," she whispered, "Is my father down? Does he know that I have been out?"

"No, dear, he has not left his room, and I hoped you would soon return, so I did not tell him."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured May, fervently. "And oh! Wheeler, you kind, dear creature, he must never, never know; he would find it hard to forgive me. Keep this secret for me; it will be the very last. I shall never leave Lake St. Ormo any more. My dream of happiness is quite, quite over! All I ask you is not to mention Mr. Forrester's name to me so long as I live. My one desire in life is to forget him, and it will be my aim and object, believe me. And now, let me go in. Don't ask me any questions, there's a good woman, only let me go in, and get to bed. I couldn't face my father to-day—I couldn't, indeed! Oh! I cannot tell you what I have suffered, but it has been very, very much indeed."

The housekeeper saw the tear-laden eyes and quivering lips, and very wisely said no word to agitate her young mistress more. She merely took her hand, and held it for a breathing space protectingly, and May walked on to St. Ormo Cottage wearily, going straight up to her own room, where Mrs. Wheeler waited upon her in silence, with assiduous kindness and attention; and when poor May was actually in bed, she went away to get her some food.

She rightly judged that she would find difficulty in persuading her to eat in her present state of excitement and mental agitation; and therefore she thought over the best means of nourishing the exhausted body without worrying the mind.

The result of her cogitation was two new-laid eggs broken into one of Sir Roger's most delicate tumblers, and beaten to a froth with a fork, to which was added half a wineglassful of brandy and a little new milk, when the whole was beaten again; and Mrs. Wheeler had not much difficulty in inducing May to drink the mixture, for her mouth was parched after her long walk in the hot sun, as she had never even thought of taking a parasol to protect her from its scorching rays.

Mrs. Wheeler very wisely darkened the room after she had given May her nourishment, and went quietly away; and the young wife, left alone with her great sorrow, cried herself to sleep.

Many times the faithful housekeeper crept in and looked at the sweet, troubled face, thankful to find her at rest at last.

"Poor lamb!" she murmured, compassionately. "The wretch can't have a heart in his body to bring sorrow upon her, and she so young and pretty, too! I can't call him a man, and that I can't; and so beautifully as he seemed to make love! Many's the time I've watched them together and smiled, and told myself how fond he was of her, and now it turns out that it was all deceit. Dearie me! to think that one can be so easily taken in,"

and the housekeeper looked daggers at the thought of Guy Forrester and his conduct to "her dear young lady," and she went downstairs with bitter anger and animosity in her heart against the artist.

When Sir Roger descended to his breakfast he begged her to inform his daughter that he was waiting for her; and he looked somewhat disturbed to learn that May was in bed with a nervous headache, and too ill to get up.

He went upstairs, and having tapped at her door, spoke to her, as though he desired to ascertain that she was really in her room; and the muffled voice from among the bedclothes having relieved his mind on that score, he returned to his breakfast, and appeared to dismiss his daughter from his mind; but he did not forget his promise to try and find out who Mr. Guy Forrester's model had been, whom he had designated "the Gipsy;" and as soon as he had finished his luncheon he ordered old Thomas to get ready his little pony and trap, and to dress himself in his livery, and attend him into Great St. Ormo.

He saw the very policeman in the town who had watched his daughter down the street, both going and returning in the morning, but the one little thought the other could have afforded him information regarding his own domestic affairs; while the policeman passed on, never dreaming that hard-looking Sir Roger Dalkeith, whom he saw occasionally in the town, could have anything so bonnie or so winsome belonging to him, as that to him unknown young lady.

The Baronet drove to the best photographer's in the place, and ordered some cabinet-sized photographs to be made from the picture of the "Gipsy," and promised to call for them upon the fourth day from that upon which he ordered them; and having been assured that the man could make satisfactory copies, Sir Roger Dalkeith left the picture; and walking down to the hotel, he entered and inquired whether Mr. Forrester had left Great St. Ormo; and upon being informed that he had started for London that morning he nodded, and returning to his trap, got into it with a decided sigh of relief that he had really left the neighbourhood.

And by the time he reached home, to all outward appearance, Guy Forrester was totally forgotten.

Sir Roger once more settled down to his books, as though nothing whatever had happened to ruffle the calm current of the stream of his life.

No one, looking at his grave, immovable face, bent over the ancient tomes, could have dreamed that he had lately had a death and a funeral in his immediate family; nor that it had been closely followed both by a wedding, and the snapping of that marriage tie by the mutual consent of the contracting parties.

All three were momentous events indeed; but each had passed away and left no visible difference in Sir Roger Dalkeith, whatever might be the feelings hidden away in his heart.

But, oh! the change in his daughter May! None the less beautiful, but a very ghost of her former bright and gladsome self she was when she appeared the following morning at the breakfast-table.

Even Sir Roger Dalkeith was startled into anxiety at the sight of his daughter.

It was May still; but the living, moving, flesh-and-blood May was changed into a very beautiful statue, carved apparently out of the purest marble.

Her father took her hand into his own with more warmth than she had ever before known him to show.

"Are you ill, my dear?" he inquired, kindly. "Would you like medical advice?"

But May knew that no doctor could cure her ailment or minister to the "mind diseased" from which she was suffering.

"Oh! no, papa, thank you," she answered with a wan smile. "I am not ill; I shall soon be better."

Nevertheless, it was a very slow process indeed.

And Sir Roger's eyes often rested upon her with a new light in them; but he was too proud to show his feelings even to May, and she little guessed how often, in those days of her soul-misery, his thoughts were with her; and how at last he absolutely regretted having parted her from her mother, and wished that it were possible again to obtain for her the inestimable boon and comfort of a mother's love.

Once only she seemed to arouse for a short time from her lethargy.

It was when he gave her back the picture of "Gipsy," and showed her the photographs he had had printed from it, and she eagerly inquired what he was going to do with them.

But as he would not, or could not tell her what course he was about to pursue, her interest in the subject lapsed once more; and her only pleasures were sometimes holding spirit converse with her mother's portrait, sometimes with that of the "Gipsy," while at other moments the little sketch of the church of St. Clement's, Jersey, would keep her as if spellbound.

She scarcely knew why; but still it undoubtedly held some strange and unaccountable influence over her.

Then, with a shiver, she would remember that it was at a church bearing the same name she had been married, and she would press her hands over her eyes to shut out the picture of the dull, cold, melancholy building, and the yellow-moustached clergyman who had performed the ceremony, and the funeral procession at the church door.

And then she no longer wondered why any church bearing the designation of St. Clement's should fill her with sadness and sorrow.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TEN RED STARS.

THE summer waned; the damps of autumn set in, rendering Lake St. Ormo even more beautiful in its glorious tints of orange, red, and russet-brown. But still there is something saddening in autumnal hues, however exquisite, speaking of decay, and quickly-fleeting loveliness, and the dreary days to come; when the leaves shall all be rotting on the ground, and altogether unsightly, before King Frost shall arrive with his magic sceptre, and transform the world into a fairy scene of purity and whiteness, with his mantle of snow wrapped around it, and his delicate filigree traceries upon tree and bush, and flowers; sparkling like myriads of diamonds in the bright sunshine, which yet has no warmth, during his reign, to melt them, until the sun-god has power over the earth once more, when he sends King Frost to the rightabout, and brings forth his gems, in the shape of the exquisite early spring blossoms.

There had been little of interest in May's life during the passing months which went by so surely, and which yet seemed so slow and lagging to her.

It cannot be said they were months of usefulness with her, for she seemed too crushed and stunned to apply herself to any real occupation; but would sit with clasped hands and hide open, but unseeing eyes, apparently gazing from the window into the far distance; or conjure up histories out of the red-hot embers in the grate.

She had shown some interest in the hoped-for finding of Gipsy; but Gipsy had not been found.

Sir Roger had sent one copy of the photo to a private detective office in London to ascertain if this lady were a professional model for artists. But the reply, after due inquiries, was in the negative.

He looked up several friends of former days living in the mazes of society, and among them Lord Rangor. But neither from him nor any of them could the Baronet learn anything.

But his lordship, feeling that he owed his old acquaintance something for troubling him by having sent the artist down to his neighbourhood, as he gathered he had done by his complete silence on the subject, and the amusing picture of a totally fanciful nature which Guy drew for his edification of his visit to the Cottage, and his interview with Sir Roger, induced him to really try, and help him in this matter about which he appeared so eager.

He therefore wrote a very kind letter to the Baronet, regretting that at present he knew no one at all answering to the description of the lady in question; but said that the face was so strikingly beautiful that it would be impossible to pass it over if once met with, and he would take great care of the photo, with the hope that he might one day come upon the original; in which case he would, without fail, acquaint Sir Roger with all circumstances concerning her which he was able to ascertain.

That she was not a member of fashionable society in London he felt assured; but as he was himself going farther afield shortly, he might yet chance to meet with the lady in question.

The truth of the matter was that Lord Rangor, still in the prime of his manhood—being not yet thirty-four years of age—had sown his wild oats, and was getting heartily tired of London, and its glare and glitter, and its hollowness.

He had never cared much for society, although he was obliged to mix in it. Still he did so, as it were, on the surface, avoiding those flirtations and love affairs which are such every-day occurrences in the lives of many men in fashionable life.

If the truth must be told, Lord Rangor cared very little about the fairer sex. He admired a pretty face, or a well-proportioned figure, or the bright, intellectual conversation of a witty, clever woman, but there the matter ended; and the match-makers found it difficult to couple his name with any debutant, as years rolled on.

Lord Rangor was, therefore, no great favourite among the ladies, who looked upon him as a very *non-admirer* sort of gentleman; while men pronounced him "a rattling good fellow all round," which, in truth, he was, although in the early part of his life, it must be confessed, mainly fond of keeping race horses, of the turf generally, and of his club, and a good game of cards in the evening.

It must be said that although, in some cases, these habits are often carried to objectionable and ungentlemanly excess, they never were with Lord Rangor, who was most honourable and upright in his dealings, both on the turf, and at the card-table; and he always kept within his extremely ample means.

But he was getting tired of both amusements, and at this period of our story, he determined to break through those habits which had not altogether improved him, or people's respect for him; and he made up his mind to go abroad at a not very distant period. And when the sun was awaking the spring blossoms from their winter bed in the pretty garden at St. Orme Cottage and the world at large, he was making arrangements for his start, but one thing after another detained him until early in May.

It was just before the opening of the Royal Academy that Guy Forrester dropped in at the Earl's house to bid him good-bye, when Lord Rangor was by chance arranging papers in a writing-case he was intending to take with him, in the pocket of which, remembering his promise to Sir Roger Dalkeith, he had placed the photograph of "Gipsy."

Mr. Guy Forrester had been on the Continent, indulging in very choice cigars and other luxuries at Sir Roger's expense; but he had sent a picture to the Academy, and it had been accepted; so he was now upon the spot to look after his own interests, and to sell it, if he could find a purchaser, at the high price he had set upon it.

As Lord Rangor opened the pocket, his eyes fell upon "Gipsy's" photo, and he drew it

out, tossing it carelessly upon the table before the artist.

"There's a face for a picture, Forrester!" he remarked, as he continued to arrange his papers. "It is one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. You don't chance to be able to supply me with her name and address I suppose, do you?"

Guy took it up with his usual cool and easy manner, but it quickly changed, and although he did his utmost to hide his feelings, his sudden agitation was but too plainly visible to his interlocutor.

"Where did you get it?" he asked, in a strange voice.

"Excuse me, my dear fellow," returned his lordship, with a smile; "but I really must decline to reply to such a direct question. Nevertheless, I am looking out for the lady, and I shall be extremely glad if you can put a name to her, and tell me her whereabouts."

"Surely, you don't know her?" gasped Guy. "Ah! now you're getting personal! If I don't, it strikes me you do?"

The artist did not answer until he had mastered his emotion, when he looked furtively in his lordship's face.

"Then you think wrong," he rejoined, coolly. "I admit she resembles someone I knew years since, but that is all."

"All right, it is a matter of indifference to me one way or the other," said Lord Rangor, and stretched out his hand for the picture, but for a moment Guy Forrester withheld it; for he was looking at the name of the photographer, and as he read it and his address, he paled visibly, but said nothing; only a look of fear settled into the dark eyes.

"Come, my dear fellow, I'm in a hurry," said Lord Rangor, somewhat mockingly. "If you don't know the lady, and cannot help me to unearth her, do not hinder me, as my time is very precious," and taking the photograph without ceremony from the artist's hand, he slipped it into the case beside one of Lady Dalkeith, which, for some reason best known to himself, usually travelled about with him, although he had endeavored it to Guy Forrester to have it copied, with the idea that her daughter would be glad to have it, if Guy got to know her upon his visit to Farnshire; but so far as the Earl knew, Guy never had seen the daughter of the woman who had been the admiration of his youth, since which all women had seemed inferior to that bright vision in his eyes, and had therefore been unable to rivet his attention; and having persuaded Guy to restore to him the copy of her photograph, he had been satisfied.

Lord Rangor was, however, a sufficient man of the world to feel certain that, in spite of the artist so strenuously denying the fact, the woman who was here portrayed under the name of the "Gipsy" was not unknown to him; and, moreover, had exercised some strong power for good or evil upon his life.

Nevertheless, it was utterly impossible for him to press for a confidence which the other so evidently meant to keep dark. So Mr. Guy Forrester took his leave, and went by the night train down to Great St. Orme to interview the photographer.

In reply to Guy's bluster, the man informed him a picture bearing the title of the "Gipsy" had certainly been photographed by him, and he was unaware that he had no right to copy it; but he begged to refer him to Sir Roger Dalkeith, who had placed it in his hands for reproduction in photographic form, and that he must deal with the Baronet and not with him in the matter.

It is needless to say that the photographer heard no more on the subject; and, although Guy looked in at the hotel to smile at the barmaid and the pretty chambermaid, both of whom had received their share of glances of admiration from his *beaux yeux* during his stay at the hotel, where he now partook of a good breakfast before starting once more for town.

He was, however, far from comfortable in his mind concerning that photograph.

He wished to heaven that he had never consented to May's keeping it; but why should Sir Roger have singled out that picture for his unpleasant attentions?

He remembered quite well how inquisitive May had been concerning it, but he could not understand what interest the Baronet could possibly take in his models, and he felt thoroughly certain that he had said nothing whatever to make May jealous with regard to the picture face.

He tried hard to solve the mystery as the train rolled on Londonwards; but, finding it impossible to do so, he turned his thoughts into a more pleasant channel, and his own great success formed his theme of retrospect during the rest of the journey.

He had painted a picture from the sketch he had first made of May, only he had very much altered it.

The garden-seat was empty in the distance, with its background of feathery trees, golden thatch, and pointed gables; while the main feature was the calm, steel-grey lake, with its fern-clad sides, upon which was a punt, on the cushions of which a young girl lay in negligent repose, one hand lazily playing with the water; the other, from which the sleeve had fallen back, was thrown up above her head, round and dimpled, and white as alabaster, apparently supporting it, throwing up the grace and beauty of the figure in its unrivalled elegance of girlish proportions; while a dainty, high-bred foot in a well-made shoe and silk stocking, just peeped from beneath the cream-coloured dress, relieved only by the crimson roses at her breast, and the blush ones upon her cheeks.

It was his very best piece of work, and he expected great things from it. In fact, he had put its price at a thousand pounds, with the certainty that he should get it.

It had been greatly admired at the private view, and he had been asked, over and over again where such a picturesque, spot, and beautiful woman were to be found; but Guy Forrester laughed off these queries with his usual nonchalant manner, and the picture stood in the Académie list under the name of "My Lady of the Lake."

He had, as before been stated, expected great things from it, but he was certainly much surprised when, upon returning to town on the first day of public view, he strolled down to Burlington House, to see the red star upon it, denoting to the crowd around it, upon the outskirts of which he stood listening, as well as to himself, that the picture, although marked at a thousand pounds, had already been purchased, and a thrill of pride and satisfaction ran through his veins at his success.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"MY LADY OF THE LAKE."

The day following that on which Guy Forrester parted from Lord Rangor, his lordship finished putting his papers together, and with his pocket-book resting safely within the breast of his coat, he rang and ordered his private "hansom," with its smart little tiger, to take him round to his club.

En route he passed Burlington House. It was private view day, but he had an order of admittance, and although he had that morning decided against going, chiefly from the want of time, he now signed to his driver to stop, and springing lightly out, he desired him to wait, making his way into the picture-gallery amid the throng of well-dressed visitors who were also going in.

What had made Lord Rangor change his mind it would be difficult to explain; but there was doubtless some half-formed idea within him that some of the artists with whom he was acquainted might possibly be able to tell him something about the "Gipsy."

The wave of strong feeling which even cool, calculating Guy Forrester could not subdue or hide from him, raised a vein of inquisitiveness in the Earl's mind, and made him desire on his own account to learn something of the

history attached to that hauntingly beautiful face.

In fact, he often found himself thinking of its owner with active speculation concerning her antecedents; and now there dawned upon the subject the light of the artist's emotion, and led him to believe that in some way the "Gipsy" and Guy Forrester had been actors together on the stage of life, and he felt that he should like to know what parts they had sustained towards each other.

He passed into the room, and was seen in conversation with some of the celebrities of the day—the art being of course the theme of conversation.

As naturally as he could he produced the photo from his pocket-book, and handing it to one of the exhibitors he laughingly remarked that even he could not beat that famed as he was for his studies of female beauty.

The Royal Academician bent low over the photograph, regarding the lineament of the features with critical eyes.

"By Jove, no, Rangor!" he said at length, eagerly. "I have never seen a more beautiful face; and it looks good, too. Am I to congratulate you?"

"To congratulate me! What upon?" inquired his lordship, in surprise.

"Upon having waited to some purpose!" laughed the other. "I thought, by your possession of the photograph that the lady was the future Countess of Rangor, perhaps. If so, I unhesitatingly say you are a lucky fellow!"

"You have jumped at a too sudden conclusion," returned the Earl. "So far I have not the honour of the beauty's acquaintance."

"I wish you could tell me how to obtain an introduction," said Sir Edgar Lely, eagerly. "I would give something for such a face to paint. There is nothing to be compared with it this year, except Forrester's 'Lady of the Lake,' with whom every one has fallen in love, and I must confess she is one of Eve's very fairest daughters. The question is where he sighted so beautiful a creature, and upon that subject there is no pumping him. You know his quiet way of laughing off a query. That young fellow will succeed in life if he produces such pictures as 'My Lady of the Lake,' and put the noses of some of us out of joint, you see if he don't!"

Lord Rangor started at the name of Guy Forrester in connection with another picture, as he could not now divide him in his thoughts from that of the Gipsy.

"You can't tell me who that is, then?" he said, as he stretched out his hand to take back the photograph.

"What! You really don't know?"

"Certainly not, or I should not be making inquiries!"

"Then let me retain it a few minutes. If the lady is known to the world of art some of us must be able to put a name to her, and I must confess I will do my best to get her to sit to me. Do you know whether this photograph was taken from the original or from a picture?" and the artist bent more closely over it.

"Ah! I see it is the latter," he continued, with an air of disappointment. "Someone has painted her already."

Lord Rangor laughed outright.

"Does that make her any the less lovely?" he asked.

"I suppose not," admitted Sir Edgar. "But we artists like a novelty. That fellow Forrester has one in his life study."

"Who told you that it is a life study?" retorted his lordship, "since he is so silent upon the subject?"

"My own experience as an artist."

"Well, take care of the photo, Lely. I can spare it to you for just ten minutes, not more—and then I must say good-bye for a long time. I have a wandering fit on, and shall probably go round the world before we meet again. I am off to-night for an indefinite period. Now I will go and look at Forrester's mysterious beauty. I'll tell you what it is, Lely, he seems to have more than his

share of luck in finding beautiful women, for he knows the lady here represented as the 'Gipsy,' or I am mistaken."

"The dickens he does?" laughed Sir Edgar. "Then good-bye to any chance of our getting a glimpse of her, for he is a selfish sort of fellow, who wants all the good things of life for himself. If I must tell the truth, Rangor, although I recognise and acknowledge his merits and capabilities, there is something in that young man which I do not like. Excuse my openness, as I believe he is a friend of yours."

"Don't apologise, my dear Lely; I am not especially gone on Forrester myself. He is a pleasant companion enough, and, as I am a bachelor, he is welcome at my house. Were I a married man—well—I am not sure I should care to see him there so often!"

"Being a Benedict, I endorse your sentiments. Forrester used his eyes too much to be a safe companion for women! That sort of magnetic battery often proves too much for them; and I have heard whispers that the young man's *affaires du cœur* are as fleeting as they are numerous. But whatever he is, he has produced a splendid picture. Go and look at it, and let me have your opinion."

Lord Rangor nodded, and turning off among the picture gazers passed along the room, glancing at the various subjects as he went, nothing very especially striking his fancy.

A crowd of spectators was grouped before one hung upon the line, and after vainly trying to catch a glimpse of it, he was going on when a few words arrested his attention.

"My Lady of the Lake!" said a clear, girlish voice. "Oh, how very beautiful! Charlie, do you think any one could really be so pretty as that? Pictures are flattered so."

"She is a ripper!" admitted the young fellow thus addressed by his sister. "Shouldn't I just like to be with her in that punt on a summer's evening on the Thames, with the dusk coming on!"

"The Thames!" answered the girl, scornfully. "Anyone can see that. But what a love of a lake that is! I wonder where it is?"

"So do I, if the lady is to be found there!" laughed the youth; and the two pushed their way on to look at the next picture.

Not so Lord Rangor; he came to a dead stop, and persistently wormed his way to the front row, to the decided dissatisfaction of the shorter people, who found his tall and stalwart figure a bar to their vision, and having secured his place he retained it.

He had not seen Lake St. Ormo since he was a very young man; but it came back to him now with a sudden flash of memory, and he stood gazing upon the once familiar scene, with the life-like figure in the punt, upon which his eyes rested with a strange, soft, dreamy look.

There was a quite sufficient likeness between May Dalkeith and her mother to prevent his doubting for one moment who the rarely beautiful girl was.

The soft dark hair, and exquisite blue-black lashed eyes, the unusually fine complexion, and the sweet, proud expression, were the heritage which Lady Dalkeith had left to her child.

And he was not slow in grasping the fact that Guy Forrester had deceived him concerning his visit to Farnshire.

He did not doubt for one second that "My Lady of the Lake" was Sir Roger Dalkeith's daughter—the fair reclusé of St. Ormo, of whom he had himself spoken so lightly to the artist.

He absolutely hated himself for his levity as he gazed at the pure, sweet, innocent young face, so like the woman he had worshipped—at a distance; but none the less truly.

Why had Guy Forrester pretended that he had never seen her? And what did such reticence on his part mean?

The question, and the sweet face of the Baronet's daughter, kept him chained to the spot. His heart went out to her.

A strange longing came over him to feel

those white, round arms about his neck, to lay his lips in a passionate kiss upon those ripe lips which absolutely smiled in company with the laughing eyes.

If his lordship had not fallen in love since his youth it seemed as though he had now done so with this wonderful picture which had taken the world of art and fashion by storm.

Not only had the ten minutes which he had promised Sir Edgar Lely gone by, but a very long time besides; so long, in fact, that remembering his haste, Sir Edgar went to seek Lord Rangor, and his unusually tall stature soon revealed his whereabouts. He made his way to his side, and laughingly touched his shoulder.

"I need not ask what you think of 'My Lady of the Lake,'" he said, "but I thought you had gone off without the 'gipsy,' you have been so long worshipping at another shrine. Forrester asks a cool thousand for it, which is a good deal for a man who has scarcely gained his laurels yet; but I think he will get it. The picture is a taking one, as I said from the first."

"Yes, he will get it," returned his lordship, with a sudden light in his eyes; "and what about the photo, Lely?"

"No one knows the original; but all unite in praising the great beauty of the lady," he replied, returning the little picture. "But if Forrester is acquainted with her, surely such a good patron as you have been of his, Rangor, he cannot refuse you an introduction."

His lordship smiled. "I expect he will introduce me to the gipsy upon the same day he presents you to 'My Lady of the Lake,' he laughed somewhat bitterly, "even though it is my intention to be his patron again."

"What! you are not going to pay a thousand for that, are you?"

"Yes! it is worth it. Good-bye, Lely. I wonder when we shall meet again!"

"At the next private view, I hope, when I shall be glad if you will turn your attention in my direction, my dear fellow," cried the artist, merrily. "I shall try and prepare something unique to tempt you. Forrester is a lucky dog, and no mistake. Bless me, what will they do without you at Newmarket? and your set at the club will be lost in your absence. Why, Rangor, they won't be able to understand being without you at all. You have been long looked upon as an 'institution,' and the *prima donnas* anticipate a bouquet from your box as a certainty."

"I'll place my boxes at Lady Lely's service," retorted the Earl kindly; "and if your wife does not object, you can bestow the flowers instead of me until I return. For the rest I have the comforting knowledge that not one heart in London will be the sadder for my absence," he ended somewhat bitterly.

"I am not sure I should look at it in that light old man!" said Sir Edgar, resting his hand upon his shoulder.

"I should not be so contented as I am if I did not know for a certainty that my wife's bright eyes are looking with a glad light for my home-coming, and my little one's baby lips ready to ask for kisses. Better follow my example, Rangor, when you find the right woman. What you call a comforting knowledge, I should consider a miserable existence."

"Ah! yes! when I find the right woman," returned the other, with a wistful look.

"I have turned thirty-four, Lely, and have seen the most beautiful women of my day. They are all very charming; but—"

"You would not care to marry them—to have any one of them as your companion through life!"

"Exactly!"

"My dear fellow, you're difficult to please; but remember the old adage,—"

"There swims no goose so gray, but soon or late, Shall find some honest gander for her mate!"

Reverse the case! One day we shall have the honest gander so content with the goose he has chosen, that he will in his heart, if not

to the world, declare her to be a *swan*! Heaven speed you, Rangor!

"Lady Lily won't say no to your kind offer of the use of your comfortable opera boxes; but she undoubtedly would to the bouquets! The *prima donnas* will have to wait till you return;" and, with a warm hand-clasp Sir Edgar Lely turned his attention to other friends.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PHANTOM VOICE, AND A PHANTOM FACE.

LORD RANGOR gave in his name as purchaser of Guy Forrester's picture, and having made the necessary arrangements for its payment and delivery at his London House so soon as the exhibition should be over, he left Burlington House and drove to the Arts Club, and afterwards to Mr. Forrester's lodgings in the hope of finding him, to ask for an explanation of his conduct concerning the account he had given of his visit to Fernshire. At the latter he found his factotum, Mark Ford, who, quickly sighting anger in the Earl's looks, stated, without hesitation, that his master was out of town for some days; and Lord Rangor seeing no reason to doubt his word, drove to his own club, vexed at not being able to give him his opinion of his deceptive conduct, and also at the loss of his own time, which was now very short. In fact, he had only leisure to make his final arrangements, return home, and pick up his valet and luggage, and save the late afternoon train for Southampton, from whence the ship, in which he had taken his passage, started for Australia, which was the first place he intended to make himself conversant with.

Going to Australia means visiting a vast tract of country, and it was many weeks before he found himself in the town of M—. It was Saturday evening when he arrived there, and the following morning he went to the chief church in the town, having heard that the music there was especially good; but even though he had received that character of it, he was quite unprepared for the musical treat which was in store for him.

From behind the curtains which surrounded the organ loft, came that gem of the *Messiah*, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and the voice which rendered it so exquisitely thrilled every nerve and fibre of his heart and soul through and through.

When the service was over he lingered to question the pew-opener, and learnt that the singer was a Mrs. Roslyn, a lady who sang professionally in M—, and who also taught singing.

The sacristan had received much kindness at Mrs. Roslyn's hands, and was loud in her praises, and raised a smile to Lord Rangor's lips.

He had not seen much of the best side of life, and he was somewhat incredulous of finding so much perfection in one woman! Nevertheless he determined to try and gain sight of this wonderful singing-bird, whose music had charmed him so completely, awaking sweet memories of a voice which he remembered in the past of long ago, which alone had had power to awaken such feelings in him till now.

Upon a boarding he saw the announcement that Mrs. Roslyn was to sing at a concert the following day, and the next morning he found the office where tickets were sold, and purchased one.

He was strangely restless during those intervening hours, yet he would have found it utterly impossible to have said why. All he knew, all he felt was that the voice he had heard the day before had raised echoes in his heart, so wondrously soft and sweet, that he could do nothing but listen to their music.

(To be continued.)

"AT HER FEET."

—O—

'Tis summer, far and near—
A perfume sweet is shed
From flowers that bloom in meadows
'Neath sunset skies of red.
They walk the fragrant meadows,
Crushing the flowerets sweet;
He tells his hopeless passion,
Low at his lady's feet.

She hears, with gentle scorning,
The story that he tells:
While, far off, o'er the meadow,
Float the soft evening bells;
And she, with drooping eyelids,
Listens to the cadence sweet,
Thus gently, coldly spurning
The lover at her feet.

'Tis summer, and 'tis sunset—
The flowers are very sweet;
Again she stands all silent,
Her lover at her feet.
He tells no tender story,
She waits and listens long—
The silence sweet is broken
By wild-birds' evening song.

"Dear love!" she whispers, softly—
The lady, cold and sweet—
But hears no answering whisper
From the lover at her feet.
The love she treated lightly
'Tis now her lot to crave—
Alas! that love is buried
With him in this low grave.

Together in the silence,
And yet how far apart—
One sleeping, calmly quiet,
And one with breaking heart;
The birds sing through the shadows,
The flowers are passing sweet,
And yet she weeps in sadness,
Her lover at her feet.

A. L. P.

GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

—O—

CHAPTER XXI.

It was neither of the men whose fate was so closely bound with Rosamond's that interrupted that awful *l'été d'été*. The person who broke so suddenly upon the two women was not Rosamond's true husband, nor yet the man whose name she bore, but Bertram, Duke of Monkton. The Duke had lingered in the smoking-room until the last minute, and was hurrying towards his dressing-room when the voice of Irene March fell on his ear, its accents full of a deep distress.

Bertram loved her well, so well that Lady Castleton was quite right in saying she could easily have become his wife; but the young Duke had a kind of chivalry in his nature, which made him very thoughtful and considerate for the girl he loved. He saw how difficult would be Irene's position if he proposed to her and was rejected, and so he waited on with his love story untold, lest the telling of it should lose his darling her careful home and large share of his mother's heart. By-and-by, he argued, Irene would be visiting her own friends, then he could follow her and ask his question. It was love for her that kept him silent after all.

And now her voice fell on his ear, raised as though in distress, and he hurried forward in time to stand between her and Lady Castleton before she signed that fatal paper.

The Countess was the first to find her voice.

"This is my apartment," she said, haughtily. "Your grace will kindly leave us."

"Certainly, and I will take Miss March with me," said Bertram, looking coolly into Rosamond's face. "I came here, Lady Castleton, because, as it seemed to me, she was in distress, and her troubles are mine!"

"She was in no distress," returned the Countess, "and I consider you guilty of unpardonable rudeness in thus interrupting us!"

The Duke answered nothing, he could feel the trembling of the hand he held, and he was only anxious to get Irene away. He led her kindly and quietly aside to a room at the head of the stairs, placed her on the sofa, and said gently,—

"Now tell me what is the matter?"

There was a brother's tenderness and a lover's anxiety in his tone. Irene tried, he saw, to answer him, but the words would not come. She burst into a fit of weeping.

"This will never do," said the Duke, authoritatively. "We shall never mend matters like this. How came you in the Countess's room? I did not think you were intimate enough for such visits!"

"She called to me as I was passing the door, and I thought I ought to go in!"

"Well?"

"And she would not let me go unless—"

"Unless you promised her something. I can guess that much. Now what was it?"

"I cannot tell you, Duke!"

"Try."

She was trembling violently; he passed his hand over her bowed head.

"Let me help you," he said, gently. "I have known for days that Lady Castleton does not like you. She never misses a chance of vexing you! She must have said something before she got to making conditions? Now what was it?"

"I can't tell you!"

"She accused you of being a twice nobler woman than herself?"

"No, oh no!"

"Irene, look on me as a brother."

"She said—you will never speak to me again when you hear all!"

"I am willing to chance that, you foolish child! Do you suppose I take you at Lady Castleton's estimates? Would her accusing you of a thing make me believe you guilty? No, indeed!"

"She said that I flirted!"

"I never saw you. With whom pray?"

"Her husband!"

The two white hands went up to hide the blushing face; crimson with shame, the poor girl bent her head to try and conceal her confusion. Bertram took one of the guarding hands and carried it to his lips.

"My dear child, you are alarming yourself needlessly. I am a man of the world, and I know a flirtation when I see one. I assure you on my word of honour no one could say a word against your behaviour to Lord Castleton. The Countess herself does not believe what she says! It is only an excuse to quarrel with you!"

"She does believe it!"

"Poor fellow! I pity him then. Perhaps in an unguarded moment he praised your style of beauty. I know you remind him of a little sister he lost years ago. Well, Irene, if the Countess believes this awful enormity of you no one else does. I don't believe in her heart she thinks so."

"She does!"

"How do you know?"

"By the conditions!"

"They were—"

"First, she wanted me to marry someone else!"

"And you refused?"

"Of course; I could not marry without love."

"And then?"

"The girl's face was crimson."

"She wanted me to take an oath never, whatever happened, to marry Lord Castleton?"

"She must be mad."

"I don't think so; she put it all down on paper and wanted me to sign it."

"And you?"

"I was just going to sign it when you came."

"I am glad I was in time to prevent it. Irene, you must avoid the Countess carefully for the rest of her stay, and whatever happens never sign that paper."

"Why not?"

He hesitated.

"It would be casting a slur on your own name. You could not guess it in your innocence, but to sign such a declaration would be like confessing you and the Earl had love passages."

Irene's cheek blanched.

"I wonder why the Countess hates me so."

"It is not worth wondering, child. Now run away and get dressed, it is fearfully late; I won't go down until I have seen you pass my door, then the frown my mother always bestows upon the last comer will be my portion, not yours. Why, child, you look like a little white ghost still."

The Countess did not appear at dinner, and to poor Irene's horror the Duchess deputed Lord Castleton to take her in. There was no escape; with a trembling heart, she laid her little white hand on Reginald's coat sleeve, and took her place at his side at the long oaken dining table.

"My wife is not coming down to-night," said Rex simply. "I wish she could get stronger; I had counted on Yorkshire air setting her up for the winter."

"Lady Castleton looks very delicate?"

"She went out too much in London; the doctor says she is suffering from over fatigue."

"Then this quiet scene ought to be good for her?"

"Quiet is the best thing possible for her; a doctor told me very soon after our marriage that her heart was delicate, and any excitement of any kind, taking her by surprise, might be fatal."

"How very sad."

"Can you guess why I am telling you this, Miss March?"

"Because you think I shall be sorry for you. Indeed I am."

"You would be sorry for any one," said Rex gently. "I never saw a human creature so full of sympathy as you are, but that was not my reason. Lady Castleton is often irritable to you. I have heard her speak to you in terms of positive rudeness. I wanted you to know her delicate health, because I thought then you would understand and make allowances for her. She suffers fearfully from sleeplessness. I think her nights of restless pain are enough to make you excuse her want of courtesy to you."

The girl smiled at him sweetly.

"I will never think of it again; I have such good health myself I cannot guess what it must be to suffer so."

But willing as she was to accept the Earl's apology for his wife, she forgot that Harry Bradley would be eager to take up the outdigs in defence of her, and that the Duke of Monkton already knew a little of what she had undergone. She would not have felt so ready to assure Lord Castleton his wife's caprices were of no moment, had she had an idea of the consultation that was to take place directly after dinner between herself, constituted guardian and his Grace of Monkton.

"Besides," said the Duke, coolly tossing away the end of his cigar, "I want you to do me a favour."

"What is it?"

"Only this; seek an interview with Lady Castleton, and tell her as Miss March's guardian you object to her insulting your ward."

A very brief explanation followed. Hal Bradley looked unusually thoughtful.

"Do you dislike the duty?" asked Bertram. "I would relieve you of it, only I should not have the same weight."

"I will speak to the Countess willingly—only—"

"Only you don't like it!"

"Lady Castleton will not like it; she hates me!"

"Have you ever seen her?"

"I have reason to believe she is a girl I

knew years ago—a girl who could not have hoped an honest woman would ever associate with her!"

The Duke looked astounded.

"If that is so the sooner she leaves this house the better. I never troubled to inquire into her past life; I knew she was on the stage."

"I cannot be certain. Until I have seen the Countess it is only conjecture."

"But something must have put it into your head?"

"Only her extreme unwillingness to meet myself. I believe now if she hears I am in the house, she will make some excuse for leaving it."

"I shall not tell her your name. I doubt if she will hear it before she sees you. Very few people here care to talk to the Countess. I used to admire her till I saw the way she treated Miss March; now I abominate her!"

"Because you like my ward?"

"Like's not the word!"

Hal looked sad.

"I wish I could see her happily married!"

"And why not? I assure you I would spend my life in the task of making her happy!"

Mr. Bradley shook his head.

"I don't think she will ever marry."

"Why not?"

"There are some women who only love once, Duke; who, however early they may make their choice, cleave to that choice only while life lasts."

The Duke understood.

"But she must have been a mere child?"

"I don't know; I never heard her history. Only once when I made some allusion to the chance of her marrying, she just shook her head and answered 'Never!'"

"Well, my mother is in no hurry to lose her, and I think she is happy here, if you will only drop a hint to Lady Castleton."

"I will do my best."

Hal Bradley had always been an early riser. The next morning was a lovely August day, and the sun came into his room as though inviting him to get up and explore the beautiful grounds of Monkton Wyld.

The show place of these grounds was a large lake at one extremity, where swans floated proudly on the water, and a tiny pleasure boat was always ready to take visitors round. Very wild and rugged in its picturesque beauty was this corner of the grounds; it looked almost like a bit of the outside moorland enclosed by mistake.

The beautiful purple heather, the spreading trees made the spot a favourite one for picnics; but it was the loneliest portion of the grounds, approached by a winding path, so narrow that only one person could walk abreast. It must have been quite a mile from the house, and for this reason the lake was not a favourite place for skating.

The Duchess was in a fright whenever it was frozen over. She always declared there would be an accident, and it was too far off for the victims to be taken to the house in time to restore them. The dangers of the lake were a favourite theme with the old lady.

But there was no danger in summer time. Hal Bradley had heard of the lake and directed his steps there. By eight o'clock he stood on the banks watching the summer sunshine falling on the rippling water.

It was a beautiful sight; the wild Yorkshire scenery making it appear impossible that he was still in the grounds of a private house.

"I wish Blanche were here," he thought.

"How pleased the child would be!"

From Blanche his thoughts not unnaturally turned to her mother. His mind was often occupied with his dead wife, but never more so than this morning.

It was very strange, his Kathleen had never been in Yorkshire, the Monktons were strangers to her, and yet from the moment he set foot in Monkton Wyld his wife's face had been ever before him, he seemed to see his Kathleen at every turn.

A footstep was near him; he looked up. Surely he must be going mad—surely he was the victim of some marvellous delusion? His wife stood before him, looking not a day older than when they parted, and, if anything, more beautiful.

His wife!

He knew she was dead; he had heard of her last hours, and yet she stood before him, her golden hair as dazzling, her form as perfect as ever, the only difference was in her attire. Instead of the cheap, home-made garments he remembered she wore a dress of fine cambric trimmed with rich lace, a certain elegance and finish about the costume proclaimed its French origin.

Almost rooted to the spot with surprise, Hal Bradley stood motionless. Nearer and nearer came the vision, until at last he could stretch out his hand and touch her arm as he uttered the one word,—

"Kathleen!"

She turned her face and saw him. Oh! the expression of her features! it almost curdled the blood in his veins. It was his wife—instant, memory, love alike told him that; but she looked at him with hatred—ay, and loathing—in her eyes.

"Kathleen," he repeated, "speak to me. What does this mean? Tell me. Why did you leave me to think you dead?"

"Are you mad?" came slowly at last from the beautiful red lips. "Unhand me, man, at once! I am the Countess of Castleton! I never set eyes upon you in my life!"

He paused and looked at her searchingly.

"Is it worth while to add to your sins?" he asked, slowly. "Kathleen, you are my wife! Nothing in the world will convince me otherwise."

"And if I deny it?"

"I shall appeal to Lord Castleton."

"He will think you mad."

"Not if I tell him all—the story palmed off on me on my return to England; my wild search for the friend who closed my wife's eyes. When he hears the Countess of Castleton dressed up her maid to represent her, and strove to remove me from her path by poisoned fruit. When he hears all this I think the Earl will see the evidence of my tale."

"He shall never hear it."

She looked into his face with that strange undying hatred.

They were standing together by the shore of the lake. Rosamond raised her hand. There was a splash, a sharp sudden cry; and then the Countess of Castleton was walking slowly towards the house—alone!

Breakfast at Monkton Wyld was an irregular meal. It was on the table by nine, and mostly lingered there till eleven.

Usually Lady Castleton was amongst the last stragglers. To-day when the Duke came downstairs at nine precisely he found her alone.

"You are early to-day, Lady Castleton."

"I might return the compliment," said the Countess, coquettishly. "It is not often you appear at this hour."

"Oh! I've an appointment to-day. I am going to ride into town with a friend, and I promised to start at ten."

"Anyone staying here?"

"No one you have seen. Miss March's guardian. He only arrived last night, and seems a fine fellow."

"Who is he?"

The Duke hesitated. He remembered Bradley's wish that the Countess should not hear his name.

"He'll be down directly, then I shall have much happiness in introducing you in due form."

"I don't want you to."

"Why not?"

"I expect you mean a Mr. Bradley—Harry Bradley?"

"The same."

"Then I don't care to know him."

"Why not?"

She hesitated.

"I knew his wife, and he treated her very badly. I should prefer not to meet Mr. Bradley."

"Then I think you had better retire to the drawing-room. I expect him here every minute."

A strange smile crossed her face. It was half derisive, half triumphant.

"I am not afraid of meeting him. I think I will risk it."

"As you please."

But ten o'clock came and no Hal. The Duke thought it strange, and despatched a servant in search of Mr. Bradley. The man returned promptly.

"Mr. Bradley is not in his room, your Grace. Joseph says he met him going into the grounds the first thing this morning. He asked him the way to the lake."

"He must have lost himself," said the Duke, laughing. "What a compliment to the extent of the grounds."

But despite the lightness of his tone he directed two of the servants to scour the pleasure gardens, and himself started in the direction of the lake.

As he passed out of the house he met Irene with a white face.

"Is it true?"

"Is what true, child? How scared you look!"

"Someone told me Mr. Bradley was dead."

"Nonsense. He has only missed his way. You know, Miss March, you used to be puzzled sometimes not to lose yourself in our winding paths."

"Are you going to look for him?"

"I am going to stroll down towards the lake. Come with me; it will be better for you than fretting alone at home."

He tried to speak lightly, but a strange suspicion of ill was at his heart. Neither he nor Irene were inclined for talk. They walked quickly on, exchanging no more words until they stood on the banks of the lake.

How beautiful it all looked, the water as sparkling as in the early morning. The sun still shone down upon the spot; it seemed impossible that such a lovely place could be the scene of a tragedy, and yet a man's hat was floating on the water.

"I don't like this," muttered Bertram, between his clenched teeth. "Irene, you know a great deal of Bradley's history. Do you think he wished for death?"

"No," she said, promptly. "When he first came home and heard of his wife's death I know he almost longed to follow her; but time has calmed his grief, and now I know he was content to live for his little girl. He had come to England expressly to choose a home, he talked of farming some small estate; we were speaking of it only last night."

"He looked too brave a man for suicide."

Irene shuddered. She was thinking of one day in her own past.

"I am quite certain Mr. Bradley would never think of suicide," she said, quietly; "he is the last man in the world to commit that sin. Besides, why should he? He had got over the first brunt of his grief, and he had a little child he idolized."

"Irene, can't you see if he is dead, and it is not a case of suicide, it must be murder."

Her cheeks blanched.

"He can't be dead, it is not four hours since the porter saw him leave the house."

The Duke shuddered.

"I wish you would go back to my mother, Irene, for your own sake."

She laid one hand timidly on his arm.

"I would rather stay here."

The Duke placed her on a rustic bench. One of the servants came up, a respectable middle-aged man who had served at Monkton Wyde for years. He was a gardener, and occupied a little cottage not very far from the lake. Being rarely in the house no news of the disaster had reached him.

"Can I speak to you, your Grace?" he asked, respectfully. "I was just going up to the House."

"What is it, Martin?" feeling singularly out of tune for the discussion of things botanical.

"It's only a bit of a message, your Grace, but I was to give it to no one but you."

"You may speak fearlessly before Miss March," said the Duke.

Martin began at once,—

"It's two hours and more ago, your Grace, I was a passing just-by here with my big dog, and we saw something struggling in the water. Nero, he's a brave creature, and he just went in and fished it out; it was a gentleman."

"Tell me he is safe," cried the Duke, "and you will have taken a burden off my mind."

"He's safe enough, your Grace; but it was an awful risk; if we'd been five minutes later he must have sunk, he was dreadfully spent. I had to drag him along till we got to my cottage, and then the wife she brought him to with hot flannels."

"It is, it must be Mr. Bradley!"

"That's the name right enough, your Grace. It was a long time before he came to, and then he wouldn't hear of being taken to the House, but he begged me to find you and ask you to go to him, and he made me promise I'd not mention the matter to anyone, however many questions I was asked."

"What could be his reason for secrecy?"

"I can't say, your Grace. He's a nice kindly-spoken gentleman, and I didn't want to cross him. He told me he'd a good motive for wishing me to keep silence."

"I am sure he had," said Bertram, slowly.

"You will oblige me, Martin, by not mentioning the matter to anyone. You will meet a heap of people searching for Mr. Bradley, but just keep your own counsel. Miss March is his ward, and we may trust her."

The man touched his hat and went off. Bertram turned to Irene.

"I must leave you here, child. You see things are better than you feared."

Mrs. Martin received the Duke with great respect, and ushered him into her own room, where, very white and haggard looking, Hal Bradley lay stretched upon the bed. He wore an old dressing-gown of Martin's, and his hair was still dripping wet; altogether he looked a strange contrast from the figure the Duke had been presented to only the evening before.

"I thought you would come!"

"I could not stay away. Bradley, there is something more in this than meets the eye. I read a secret in your very caution. What is it?"

"Shut the door."

The Duke looked it.

"Are we quite alone?"

"Quite. Mrs. Martin is in the kitchen, the children are at school; no one can overhear us."

Hal gasped as with sudden emotion.

"I wish I had died before to-day!"

"My dear fellow, why?"

"I have seen her—she the world calls Lady Castleton, the Earl's wife!"

"You have seen her?"

"Ay. I know her reason for avoiding me now!"

"And she is the woman you suspected?"

"No; a thousand times no! She is my wife!"

"Bradley!"

"I am in my sober senses. Do you think I could be mistaken? I tell you the woman Lord Castleton deems his Countess is the wife I wedded years ago—the wife who let me mourn her as dead, who deserted her little child and broke my heart just for the sake of gold!"

"But it would be bigamy."

"It is bigamy!"

"But—"

"I was a poor man, or she thought so then; she always longed for wealth. I suppose the thought of being Lady Castleton tempted her; but oh, it was cruelly done!"

"You mean that this—this woman married Lord Castleton and let you be told she was dead?"

"Just that."

"It is fiendish!"

"It has broken my heart, I loved her so. Never wife was more cherished than she. Ah! Heaven, you can't realise all she was to me!"

"And she knows you recognised her, and that her imposture is discovered? Why, I saw her myself this morning, and she seemed to have no fears!"

"She had none; she had removed, as she thought, all risk of detection."

"What do you mean?"

"Only this; my life endangered her reputation. A word from me would have ended her career as a Countess; so she took care to remove me!"

"To remove you?"

"Her little hand," the strong man's voice quivered, "the little hand I have so often fondled, which once wore my wedding-ring, was to send me to my doom. She pushed me into the lake and then hurried home that my dying screams should not fall upon her ear!"

"Bradley, this is awful!"

"You understand my caution now?"

"Ay; what is to be done?"

"I cannot tell. This is not the first attempt she has made upon my life. Oh, Duke, I would give that worthless life over and over again if I could only make her all I once thought her, only wash the stain of murder from her soul!"

"Something must be done."

"But what? I cannot appear against her. I remember she is the wife of my youth, the mother of my child. I cannot get into a witness box and swear she has tried to take away my life."

"It will half kill the Earl!"

"I think not."

"Why not?"

"It is not a happy marriage. Before I ever saw his wife's face I knew Lord Castleton was a miserable man. It will be a shock to him, but not an irreparable one."

"You don't help me as to the course I should take."

"I can't."

"I must do something. The Countess may be trying to murder another of my guests soon!"

"There is one man who could help us—Arthur Milton."

"The author? How?"

"He was with me in France when the first attempt on my life was made. He would judge things more clearly than I can do."

"I'll telegraph for him. Will you not come back to the house?"

"I think not, Duke. I dare not look upon my wife's face again."

The Duke felt he was right. He despatched a telegram to summon Mr. Milton to Monkton Wyde, and then he went home to find the whole household darkened by the shadow of their guest's sudden and awful end.

"The waters of the lake should be dragged," suggested Lady Castleton. "I have no doubt Mr. Bradley walked too near the edge, and accidentally fell in."

The Duke sighed.

"His visit to Yorkshire has certainly been ill omened for him. I have just sent for his nearest friend."

"And who is that?" asked the Countess, sharply.

"Mr. Milton, the author!"

Rats desert a falling house, and guests fly from a scene of disaster. By lunch time only six were left to meet around the table, and of these only three were visitors—Lord and Lady Castleton and Lady Lillian Carew. It was a constrained meal; to the Duke and Irene it was painful to hear the allusions to Bradley's fate, knowing he was alive. Lord Castleton was anxious about his wife; he had learned to know the two bright red spots which burnt in her cheeks as the harbingers of one of those fearful attacks which he had been warned must one day prove fatal.

"I feel we should not trespass on you after such a catastrophe," he said, gravely, to the

Duke, "but my wife has set her mind on staying, and she is so ill I do not like to cross her."

"You are very welcome, Rex!" Here the two men shook hands. "Dear old boy, I only wish I could spare you any suffering!"

Rex sighed.

"You are thinking I give way blindly to all Rosamond's caprices. Bertie, you have no idea how ill she is! Beautiful and brilliant as she appears, she is the victim of an inward fever which saps her strength; quiet and calm are the best things for her, but no persuasions of mine will induce her to try them. We have not been married a year yet, and I know the time I shall keep my wife may be counted by months!"

Bertram shrugged.

"Love is a strange thing!" he said solemnly. "how very few it makes really happy!"

"Mutual love makes all who share it happy," he said, quickly. "A one-sided passion brings only misery. Bertram, never marry, unless your wife gives you love for love!"

Arthur Milton did not disregard the telegraphic summons. He started by a morning train, and reached the gardeners' cottage a little before six.

"Your course is simple," he told Hal. "you must come with me to Monkton Wyde, and enter the drawing-room while the family are assembled; your wife will then betray herself, and the future will be easy."

"I cannot denounce her. I know all you would say, but I cannot do it."

"I don't want you to, Bradley. She will denounce herself. You can't go on like this. Just fancy the wrong you are inflicting on Lord Castleton!"

"The wrong?"

"Certainly. As things are, if children come to them they will be nameless. He is living in sin. Hal, you would be sharing your wife's guilt, if to him at least you did not reveal the truth."

Bradley shuddered.

"I am willing!"

It was eight when they reached Monkton Wyde, and the family were gathered in the drawing-room—that is, some of them—Lady Lillian was in her own room writing African letters, and the Duchess had retired. The other four were sitting quietly together.

The porter almost went into his when he saw Mr. Bradley, as he supposed, risen from the dead; but a word from Milton relieved him, and he allowed the two gentlemen to walk upstairs unannounced.

None of those present ever forgot that first entrance into the drawing-room. The Duke and Lord Castleton were playing chess, Irene busied herself with the coffee equipage, and Lady Castleton, a bright light in her glorious eyes, was singing a ballad of "strange, almost unearthly sadness, entitled 'A Song of Love and Death,' the words were by Lord Tenryson, and beautiful as his poems always are; but there is something so intensely pathetic in them that I never heard the ballad without a throb of pain.

None of the four heard the footsteps of their unexpected guests. It was Lord Castleton who, looking up, saw them advancing.

"Good Heavens!" he cried. "Bradley!"

The name fell on Rosamond's ear. She rose from the piano, and rushed like a panther towards the new comers.

"It is a lie!" she cried, "a cruel, base lie. Hal Bradley lies beneath the blue waters of the lake. Do you think I can be mistaken? I, who planned his death before? I, who swore he should not live!"

Reginald listened with a blanched face.

"It is not true!" he said huskily. "I have feared for weeks her reason was deranged. Oh! Rosamond, my love, my darling, unsay those wild words. Think what meaning might be attached to them."

Rosamond looked at him firmly.

"I don't care," she said, doggedly. "Hal Bradley is dead. This must be someone got up to represent him. I tell you, Rex, I killed

him. I am your true wife now, no one can come between us any more." And then she stopped, as though for breath, and a crimson stream dyed her neck and dress, proclaiming the excitement had been all too much and she had broken a blood-vessel.

"Leave us," said Lord Castleton to Hal Bradley, who stood speechless. "I implore you leave us. Your presence for some reason excites my wife!"

"I will go gladly. But first I must tell you the truth. This poor creature"—and he pointed to Rosamond—"is not your wife."

Rex gasped.

"She never has been. Oh! don't make my task harder. She was my wife—mine! I left her and my little child while I went to make a fortune for her. When I returned I heard the mother was dead. No one could tell me how and where my wife died, all referred me to Miss Letrange."

"For months I sought Miss Letrange, or rather Lady Castleton, once I saw her maid. When I came to Monkton Wyde I knew why my task had been so difficult. Lady Castleton was Kathleen Bradley!"

Rex turned hastily to the Duke.

"Is this true?"

Bertram bowed his head.

"It is quite true," went on Bradley. "Do you think I could deceive you? This morning I met my wife face to face. Lord Castleton, her own words have told you what followed."

Rex said nothing, he seemed as one stupefied. The only creature who dared attempt to comfort him was his unknown cousin.

"She loved you," she murmured, faintly. "Perhaps it was for love she sinned. Think of that, and judge her mercifully."

"For love." Oh! how harsh the voice sounded. Oh! how it went through the hearts of some of the listeners as the woman who had sinned so grievously spoke to them once more. "For love! nonsense! I don't believe in it! I never did! I married Reginald because I wanted to be a Countess! Love! I'd had enough of love in a cottage! I wanted wealth, and I got it! No one will believe a madman against me! I am Lady Castleton!"

The outburst was too much for her. Again that tell-tale crimson stream betrayed the breaking of another vessel.

A doctor was sent for in hot haste; but he only shook his head despairingly. Nothing could save the Countess. She might linger till the morning, she could never see another sunset.

She never spoke again. That awful burst of defiance was the last time she would utter words. What grievous thoughts must have thronged her brain; but she could give speech to none of them. She could not implore pardon of her husband, or of the other man she had so wronged. She could not mention her little child.

Perhaps, though, she was too hardened in her sins to have wished to do any one of these things. No one could tell whether, at the eleventh hour, she repented.

Irene declared that her eyes sought Reginald's face with something like love in their depths just before she died; but then our heroine was too much given to think the best of others even of her enemies.

It was over.

All that was mortal of the erring beauty was laid to rest in the pretty graveyard of Monkton Wyde.

No stone marks the spot. Very many have wondered a Countess should only have the grass and flowers to cover her.

One ventured once to express this wonder to the Duke of Monkton. He knew full well the reason of the omission, that neither of the two men who had loved her would put up an inscription telling a falsehood. The truth must be hidden for all time. So his Grace answered simply,—

"She loved flowers. It may have been her

own expressed wish. I can only tell you Lord Castleton would have spent his whole fortune to save her one pang."

Lord Castleton had gone abroad directly after the funeral. This time he had not refused his friend's help. He had accepted from the Duke a loan of ten thousand pounds; six thousand would go to the Jews in payment of the five months' allowance received from them; and as this put twelve hundred interest into their pocket, and a rumour was being widely circulated that the true heiress of Castleton had been discovered, the money-lenders were tolerably content.

The remainder of Bertram's loan went to defray the debts incurred by the late Countess.

It was noticed that considerable sums had been given by her to her late maid, who quitted her just as she went to Monkton Wyde. But Rex never inquired into that; instinct told him Pauline had been in Rosamond's confidence, and the presents to her were hush money.

So save for that loan from his friend which he hoped in time to pay, Rex was a free man, and he accepted very gratefully the offer of Sir James Stady of an attachéship at Grüningen, and an income of some eight hundred a year. Within a month of Rosamond's death he had entered on his new duties, and pleased as his cousin Annabel was to welcome him, her heart bled when she saw the changes six months had made in his handsome face.

He worked unrelaxingly at Grüningen, he seemed to care for nothing in the way of pleasure or society; in truth, Rex was applying himself to literature, and with such success that two years after his wife's death he had repaid no small slice of the Duke of Monkton's loan.

It was just about that time he chanced to be in London on business connected with his writings. He had a month's absence from Germany, but meant only to spend a few days in England, when, as fate would have it, he ran against the Duke.

Bertram was delighted; he declared there was no one he had so wished to see.

"We are staying at Whitby. Of course you'll come down with me. We have a charming house, and the mother and Irene will be delighted."

"Miss March is with you?"

"Of course, she'll never leave my mother!"

"Unless she marries."

"She will never marry."

"I used to think you would make her Duchess of Monkton!"

Bertram looked at him a little curiously.

"I respect Irene more than any woman I know, and I think she loves me as a brother, but I am quite sure she would never be my wife; and, to tell you the truth, I have no intention of asking her!"

"I beg your pardon."

"Not at all. You'd better come down with me, Rex. After next December you'll be such a big man you'll have no time for visits!"

"Next December!"

"Surely you've not forgotten? Your uncle will have been dead three years then, and as nothing has been heard of Lady Gerda, you'll come into the property!"

"I have given up thinking of that!"

He went to Whitby, and in that lovely, quaint old watering-place he learned that his heart had not been buried in Rosamond's grave, but was capable of a love as strong and faithful, though perhaps less fierce and passionate, as the one he had poured out upon the beautiful young actress. In the Duchess of Monkton's adopted daughter he saw a sweet-faced, high-souled woman, fit to go hand in hand with him down the stream of life, and gild its waters with a newer changing brightness, by her loving unselfish companionship.

Bertram was his confident. Bertram, who long ago had heard from Gerda's own lips the true story of her sacrifice, and had more than suspected it had been made for love's dear sake.



[A TERRIBLE CRIME.]

"She would never listen to me," said Rex, despondingly. "Why, your mother says she might have been a marchioness, and what have I to offer her but an empty title?"

"I suppose you can offer her love. I fancy that is what she will think most of."

Love! ay; but think of her luxurious life here, and what I could offer her?"

"I don't suppose you mean to propose actual hardships for her to share," said the Duke coolly; "besides, she has known too much poverty to fear it."

"I know! Hal Bradley told me what he saved her from."

"Well, Rex, you must do your own wooing. I will wish you success, though it makes my home lonely!"

And that very night, gazing on the stormy waters of the great North Sea, Rex asked his question.

"Can you really love me?" was the reply. "I thought your heart was buried in Lady Rosamond's grave?"

"I can love you as that heart's dearest treasure," he answered her. "Dear one, I am offering you not the frenzied passion of youth, but the sure, steadfast love of my manhood. If you can give me any hope, my darling, put your hand in mine and promise to be my wife?"

The lily fingers slipped into his.

"I think I have loved you for a long time," she said, slowly. "I was so sorry for your troubles. First losing Castleton, and then—"

He interrupted her.

"I shall never regret Castleton if I have you. Ah, Irene! I can't give you a home like you have had with the Duchess; but I will do my best to make you happy."

"I never cared for grandeur."

He smiled.

"And when will you come to me?"

"When you please, only—"

"Only what, sweetheart? The Duchess approves my wooing. There is no one else

whose opinion we need ask. You have no relations, have you?"

"Only a cousin."

"A cousin. You would like him to give you away?"

"No; but I should like to tell him of our engagement."

"I will call on him. Tell me his name?"

"It is the same as mine."

"March?"

"March is not my real name. I only gave it to Mr. Bradley when he found me in my troubles, because I could not bear to give him the real one."

"And what is the real one?"

"You won't be angry?"

"I could never be angry with you, Irene."

"I am not Irene, you know, really, only the Duchess will call me so because it was my mother's name."

Rex smiled.

"I expect I shall go on calling you Irene to the end of my days. Now, dear, tell me if you are not Irene March, who are you?"

"You won't be angry?"

"My darling, I don't mind what other names you bear so I may give you one title, that of wife."

Her little hand was clasped in his. She hid her face upon his breast.

"Now, my darling, what is it? I promise not to mind, even if it's Smith or Jones."

"It is neither," said the girl, gently. "It is, oh! Rex, hold me closer—Gerda Travers."

A long, long pause.

"And I am your cousin, whom I wanted to ask to give you away?"

"Yes."

Another long pause.

"You promised not to be angry, Rex."

"Nor am I, sweetheart, only—"

"You are sorry."

"I can't refuse the gift, because, without it, I can't have the giver. Only, Irene, I wish with all my heart the giving had been on the other side."

It was a very short engagement. Lord Castleton and his cousin were married when the golden corn waved in the fields. They did not have a honeymoon in the ordinary sense of the word, for they went straight home to Castleton, now under Reginald's inheritance, and his children after him.

For there are two children now in the stately nursery; a blue-eyed Gerda and a roguish baby, Viscount Travers.

The Duke of Monkton and his mother (still active and fond of society) are frequent guests at Castleton. Lady Lillian Carew and her gallant husband; Hal Bradley and his little girl; Florence and her children, all come from time to time to visit the Earl and Countess. And some of them have been heard to say that they never met a happier wedded pair, never saw a more perfect married life than that of Rex and his wife. And one or two of the Earl's visitors, who fancy themselves exceptionally clever, declare that the little blue-eyed daughter, who is already her mother's image, will heal a heart that mother all unconsciously wounded; for this five-year-old damsel already holds the Duke of Monkton captive to her lightest caprice; and Bertram is of such a cheerful, light-hearted disposition, that these gossips predict the seven-and-twenty years between him and his destined bride will be of no consequence whatever.

This may come to pass, or it may not. The Earl and Countess do not, as yet, indulge in match-making for their little daughter; but if her mother ever had a wish for her first-born, it is that she may, like herself, marry for love's dear sake alone, and may be spared the bitter pain and heartache which purchased GERDA'S SACRIFICE.

[THE END.]

THERE are few things in life more interesting than an unrestricted interchange of ideas with a congenial spirit, and there are few things more rare.



["MR. FORTESCUE!" THE WIDOW CRIED. "IS IT POSSIBLE?"]

NOVELISTS.]

RESCUED BY LOVE.

—O—

CHAPTER I.

SHE was a girl of nineteen, with a sweet English face, framed by masses of soft brown hair. She looked at you with two large dreamy grey eyes, whose glance met yours with frank simplicity. Her colour varied with every passing feeling. She could be grave or gay, lively or silent, as the mood suggested. But there was nothing in her bearing—nothing in her fair girlish beauty—to make you guess that her lot in life had in it anything peculiar. You never could have known, unless you had been told, that Ina Fortescue was destined by fate to be one apart.

And no one knew why. No human creature in the dear sleepy village where Ina grew up could have explained the destiny which awaited her; though everyone could have told you, as a matter of course, that Miss Fortescue had a peculiar history.

The story of the past was public property. It had been told to her over and over again.

Mrs. Cameron, who was not good at keeping secrets, had related it to all her friends at the time it took place. Ravenstone rather prided itself on the occurrence—as the one incident of romance the place had ever known.

The story was short and simple. Left a widow, very slenderly provided for, Mrs. Cameron had thought of opening a school, and had gone as far as inserting an advertisement for pupils in the London papers.

Only one answer ever came. A gentleman called one blustering March night, and demanded to see the widow alone.

She described him afterwards as tall and stern, with a dark handsome face, and such commanding manners! She did not think anyone could have resisted his authority.

He went to the point at once. He had one child, a motherless girl of four. He did not require for her a school, but a home. What would be Mrs. Cameron's terms to receive his daughter, and make a home for her.

Mrs. Cameron gasped, and ventured the question, might she receive other pupils? The answer was prompt. Certainly not. Miss Fortescue must be her sole charge. He was willing to pay five hundred a-year, on condition that his daughter received a lady's education, and a mother's care.

He had heard of Mrs. Cameron before, and would be perfectly contented if she undertook the charge.

There were conditions attached. The child was never to sleep a day away from Ravenstone, and never make a visit without her guardian. She was to be dressed well and simply—educated as became a gentlewoman. But she was to be taught from her earliest years that her life was a shadowed one, that she must never expect the amusements and gaiety she saw others enjoy.

Mrs. Cameron was amazed.

"Do you mean the little girl is so delicate you fear she will not grow up?"

"She is in perfect health."

"Perhaps her mother was delicate, and—"

"My wife never ailed anything until she gave her life for our daughter's. Understand me, madam, there must be no theories of your own to account for my wishes. I make you a plain proposal. It rests with you to accept or decline it."

The poverty-stricken widow thought of the five hundred a-year and grew brave.

"You would wish to see her sometimes?"

"When I do I can come here. I should require you to send me a yearly account of the child's health. My bankers will send you a cheque quarterly in advance. For the rest, my conditions are few. She is never to sleep out of Ravenstone; never make a visit unaccompanied by yourself; and you are to make

her understand her future must be different from that of other girls."

The extraordinary bargain was concluded.

Mrs. Cameron, who had been vastly pitied by Ravenstone for her poverty, and even would have thought herself fortunate to be able to earn two pounds a week, by one brief half-hour's interview was provided for far more handsomely than in her husband's lifetime.

There was no demand for references. Mr. Fortescue declared his friends knew Mrs. Cameron well, and, on her part, how could she express a wish for credentials when her visitor showed himself so generous.

It was a strange incident altogether, and when she told of Mr. Fortescue's visit and her golden hopes, her friends were inclined to laugh at her as a visionary.

But not for long. In three days' time arrived bank-notes for a hundred and twenty-five pounds, and a little girl, led by a respectably dressed woman, and accompanied by three large boxes.

If Mrs. Cameron had hoped for any information from Ina's previous caretaker she was disappointed. The woman was frank to a fault, but she evidently knew nothing beyond that she had answered an advertisement about a nurse-child, and received the little girl she now brought to Ravenstone.

"She was but six months old then, ma'am," said the nurse, respectfully, "and she's been like my own ever since; but my husband he's wild to be off to the diamond mines in Africa, and from all we hear there's a fine fortune to be made there. But it's not the place for a bit of a child like that, even if her pa were induced to let her go, which, of course, being she's the only one, he isn't."

"She is not at all like him," said Mrs. Cameron thoughtfully. "I suppose she takes after her mother."

"Like enough," replied the woman; "but she's a dear little creature, ma'am, and many's the time I've wondered her father could bring himself to part from her."

"Perhaps he couldn't help it?"

"Why, he rolls in money, ma'am! Leastways, he do seem to, and a rare open-handed gentleman he is; but he never comes near the child. She might be dead and buried before he knew of it."

"Do you mean he never came to see her?"

"Never once," returned the woman, shortly. Ina made herself at home promptly. The motherless girl and the childless widow seemed in a little while to belong to each other. Mrs. Cameron had but one fear. If Mr. Fortescue changed his plans for his daughter, how terribly she would miss the comfortable home his payment secured her.

She was a prudent body, and saved a little for such a catastrophe; but the years came and went without showing any hint of Mr. Fortescue's changing his mind. The money arrived punctually to the day, once a year. Mrs. Cameron forwarded a report of her charge's welfare, but no news came of the absent father; and for all they heard of him at the cottage he might have been dead and buried.

As Ina grew up the difficulties of the position began to appear. She was the darling of all the village; every one loved her. There was no one among her young friends half so popular yet when she was pleased to spend a few days with them at the seaside, or to go to London for a glimpse of sight-seeing, although the visitors were Mrs. Cameron's old and trusted friends—although they promised to care for Ina as their own child—the widow was obliged to refuse. She had promised Mr. Fortescue his daughter should never be a night away from Ravenstone, she used to say, in reply to all entreaties, and she must keep her word.

And now Ina was nineteen. For fifteen years she had lived in the seclusion of the country village, and seen no one beyond its people; and yet—such is the power of birth and inheritance—no one could possibly have taken her for a village girl. She looked aristocratic to the tips of her fingers; the education given her had brought out the intelligence of her character. She sang sweetly, played with taste and feeling, was a fair linguist, and an excellent English scholar—just the girl parents might have been proud of, and who seemed fitted to make the sunshine of a good man's home.

Mrs. Cameron was thinking over Ina's future one bright June afternoon. She loved the girl almost as though she had been her own; and she could not bear to remember Mr. Fortescue's cruel words that she was doomed to live a life apart, nor could she see any reason for it. In health, intellect and breeding she left nothing to desire. If and the widow in her bewilderment sometimes thought this must be the true explanation of the mystery there had been anything irregular in her parents' marriage, surely there was no cause to vent it upon their child, even if she had really no name of her own. Ina was too fair and attractive to be left lonely and unsought.

And this played no small part in Mrs. Cameron's musings. There was someone in Ravenstone quite ready to give her another name instead of Fortescue. Randolph Douglas was a distant cousin of the widow's, and he had come to Ravenstone on a sketching expedition. He was of good family, fair present income, and great expectations. His father had wished him to be a soldier even while owning there was no real cause for his following a profession at all; but Mr. Douglas was a born artist, and his ambition was to see his work on the walls of the Academy. As in all else he was a model son, he was allowed to follow his own wishes. He had inherited a few hundreds a year from his mother, which proved ample for his simple wants. He never applied to his father for an allowance, never ran into debt; and so the old man, who was not without a good deal of common sense, decided that Randolph was a boy he need not feel ashamed of, and gave up envying his neighbour, Lord Canten, his son's gay uniform,

since the peer whispered to him, in confidence, he should have to sell a goodly amount of timber to make up the sum required for his heir's expensive hobbies.

Poor Mrs. Cameron! The Douglas family had been her "grand relations" ever since she could remember. A kind of feudal loyalty bound her to them; and when Randolph came down to Ravenstone she had gladly hidden him to her house, and given him of her best, and now her kindly hospitality was likely to cost her dear.

It had pleased—judging from that morning's correspondence—neither Sir Ralph nor Mr. Fortescue, and it might be it had led to a real grief for the young people she had so innocently thrown together.

Sir Ralph wrote, briefly thanking her for the hospitality she had shown his boy, but expressing a hope she was not letting Randolph fancy himself in love with her adopted daughter. "I need not tell you, Mary," wrote the sage old Baronet, "a child of yours would be welcome to me as my son's wife. But I hold in horror all adopted relationships. If people desert their own children and let them be taken by other people, depend on it there is a flaw somewhere. So if you observe any tenderness between Randolph and your young lady, I hope you'll send him about his business."

This was bad enough for in her poor little pride the widow had suffered her richer kindred all these years to remain under a misapprehension.

She called Ina her "dear little girl," later on "sweet adopted daughter," quite forgetting to mention the pecuniary arrangement between her and Mr. Fortescue, which made her really only the paid chaperon and protectress of the child.

This was bad enough, but there was worse to come. A short note, in the hand only familiar to her because of the signature on those, her welcome quarterly cheques.

"DEAR MADAME.—It has come to my ears that you are permitting an acquaintance between my daughter and a young man! Is not this forgetting the nature of our agreement? For reasons it is needless to dwell on, my child's life must be one apart. And only trouble can come of her permitting herself to dream of love or marriage. I hope to come down to Ravenstone in a day or two. Meanwhile I must urge you to put a stop to the acquaintance I have alluded to at once.—Yours faithfully, "FORTESCUE."

It struck her as a little odd he used no initial, but this was lost sight of in the terror that he meant to remove Ina. Not only would the widow lose her liberal income, but she really loved the girl she had brought up, and the mystery thrown over Ina's history terrified her.

Why should not the child marry Randolph if he loved her? They would make the handsomest couple ever seen in Ravenstone!

Sir Ralph's objections would melt into air when he saw the sweet-faced bride; while as to Mr. Fortescue, surely if he had been content to renounce his daughter for fifteen years, her future could be no concern of his?

Enter through the French windows Randolph Douglas, a smile on his handsome face, which vanished as he caught sight of Mrs. Cameron's troubled looks.

"My cousin Mary, what's the matter?"

"Where is Ina?"

"Miss Fortescue has been carried off by the Lady Rector to give her opinion on the choice of boys for the Sunday-school treat. Being a question I didn't feel gratified to decide I declined to go to the Rectory, and came here. What is the matter?" he repeated, kindly. "You were invisible when I called this morning, and now you look bothered."

He was nine-and-twenty, and had never had a trouble in his life beyond Sir Ralph's faculty for match-making; but he was neither unsympathetic nor unfeeling. He believed all lonely women were fond of shaky invest-

ments, and ascribed Mrs. Cameron's eyes to the news that some bubble company in which she was interested had failed.

"You mustn't fret," said Randolph, consolingly. "I dare say things are not so bad after all. Tell me all about it, and let me see if I can't do something?"

"You!" exclaimed Mary Cameron, smiling in spite of herself. "Why, Ran, it is all about you."

"Good gracious!"

"Look here!" and she gave him his father's letter, "I got this this morning."

Ran read it through in no wise dismayed.

"I can't imagine how he found it out, but I know for weeks my mind has been made up. I shall marry Ina, or go single to my grave. I should have spoken to her long ago, but I feared to risk all by asking her too suddenly. I am glad you have given me a chance of telling you my hopes. You'll be on my side, won't you, Cousin Mary? The governor may refuse to increase my income, but I've seven hundred a year from my mother which no one can rob me of, and Ina is not ambitious. We could be happy on that."

"Very! But Ran, don't you see? Doesn't this letter tell you Ina is not my daughter?"

"I never thought she was!" returned Randolph. "Why, I have heard the story from herself. Her father brought her here fifteen years ago, and has never been to see her since. I don't mind telling you, cousin Mary, I believe Mr. Fortescue is a thoroughly bad lot; but I would risk even his spurning on us rather than lose Ina!"

"My dear Ran!"—oh! how the poor woman wished she had not made that little reservation in writing to her relation, but spoke frankly of her poverty—"you don't quite understand. I was far too poor to adopt a child. When my husband died I thought of opening a school. Mr. Fortescue offered, if I would take charge of his daughter, and have no other pupils, to make a handsome allowance for her. From the day Ina came here I have been paid five hundred a year for her expenses."

It was Ran's turn to look troubled now.

"Then he is a rich man?"

"I have no idea. This is not all, Ran. Read this note from him which came to-day."

Randolph's comment was prompt.

"He must have a spy in the village."

"But, Ran, what does it mean? Will he take her away? It would be like losing a child of my own. And he is so hard and stern, I should dread the thought of her being in his power!"

"Have you only seen him once?"

"Only once."

"And Ina?"

"Ina has no recollection of him at all."

"What is his profession?"

"I have no idea."

"He looked a gentleman."

"Oh, yes, every inch! Ina is not in the least like him, I suppose she takes after her mother."

"Alive?"

"No; she died at Ina's birth."

"That might explain it. He can't forgive the poor child for costing her mother's life."

Mrs. Cameron shook her head.

"Then he would be glad to think of her as married, which would free him of all responsibility. No, it is not that. And why does he talk of her living a life apart?"

Randolph shook his head.

"I don't like it."

Mrs. Cameron's anxiety was all for Ina.

"If he is unkind to her, Ran, it would break her heart!"

"He shall never do that!" declared Randolph, bravely. "If only Ina will consent she shall be my wife, and I will defend her against all the fathers in the world!"

But the widow shook her head.

"Think of Sir Ralph!"

"His bark is worse than his bite!" replied the son affectionately, if a little disrespectful. "He would never hold out long

against us. He has always wished for a daughter, and where could he find a fairer, sweeter one than Ina?"

"You forget," said Mrs. Cameron, hurriedly, "she is but nineteen. For two years her father has complete authority over her; and, to judge from his letter, would he be likely to give his consent?"

Randolph looked grave.

"I shall speak to Ina to-night. Don't look so troubled, Cousin Mary. She may refuse me, and then you will have no further trouble; but if not," and the young man's eyes brightened, "depend upon it, if my darling gives me a ray of hope, I will win her in spite of all the fathers in the world! Why, if he saw we were in earnest, he would be sure to give in!"

"You have not seen him. I tell you, Ran, he looked as stern as iron!"

"Ah! here comes Ina," said Randolph, who had been looking from the window. "I shall go and meet her. I know she meant to pick some strawberries for tea. When you see me again, Cousin Mary, my fate will be decided!"

He came up with Ina just by the strawberry beds.

She was a strikingly pretty girl, and well-deserved the title given her by her admirers, of the "belle of Ravenstone." Of medium height, a slight, willowy figure, she moved with perfect grace. Her brown hair had a golden tint, as though the summer sun had kissed it. Her face had the prettiest wild-rose bloom, and her grey eyes were tender and full of intelligence.

But one thing always struck keen observers about Ina. She had come to Ravenstone a child of four. For fifteen years no unkind word had ever been spoken to her, and yet there was at times an expression almost of dread upon her face. She seemed in abject terror of harsh treatment, or in fear of some danger imminent to her, unthought of by all others.

"Ina."

She started. It was the first time Randolph had ever called her by her name.

A deep blush dyed her cheeks. He took her hand and drew her towards a rustic bench.

"I want to talk to you, Ina. Child, how you tremble. Surely you are not afraid of me?"

"Oh, no. But—"

"Never mind the but," said Randolph, fondly. "Do you know what I am going to tell you, Ina? Very soon I shall have to leave Ravenstone."

Every trace of colour faded from her cheek. "Must you really go? We shall miss you so!"

"I must, indeed, leave Ravenstone. But, Ina, if I have my will you shall not miss me, dear. I want you to come with me."

"To come with you!"

"As my much-loved wife! Ina, I can't tell when I began to love you. Sweetheart, I am not good at speaking of what I feel; but if you will only trust me I think I can promise you shall be happy. I love you so I must be able to win your heart in time."

"And I love you," she whispered. "Only I never guessed it till this moment. Life has seemed quite different since I knew you!"

"Then you will be mine?"

But the question brought her back to everyday life. She remembered the sad trouble impressed on her from childhood.

Not for her were amusements and gaiety, not for her joy or love. Her life was a marked one; her fate must be different from that of the girls she saw around her.

"I cannot; oh, I cannot!"

"And why?"

"Don't you know?" she blushed. "Hasn't your cousin told you? There is a great shadow on my life, and my future must always be dark and lonely. My father said so."

"Dear!" cried Randolph, hotly, "no human being has the power to predict what another's future will be; and the father who has

neglected you for fifteen years has forfeited all claim to your love and obedience. Only promise to be my wife, and leave me to deal with him."

She did not withdraw the little hand he had taken. She looked into his eyes with a world of sorrowful tenderness in her own.

"But it may be disgrace. Have you thought of that? Before you came I used to puzzle over my history very much. I wondered so what could be the mystery that hung over me!"

"It can be no disgrace of yours," said Ran, firmly. "You are pure and good as an angel!"

"But my father. I never say it to Mrs. Cameron, she would not like it. But I fancy sometimes he has done something very wrong, and he is always moving about for fear it should be found out."

"My darling, what shall I say to convince you? Listen, Ina! Were your father a criminal, even, it would not change my wishes! Nothing does change true love! Whatever your father may be, Ina, it is you whom I love, and his sins have nothing to do with you. It is not even as though you had passed your life at his side, and his training and influence could have left its mark upon your character! No! You have only to give me your promise, dear, and the whole world should not part us. If Mr. Fortescue is very angry he might prevent my seeing you for two years; but when once you are of age no father in the world can hinder our marriage!"

The little fingers glided into his. The sweet voice whispered,—

"And you are sure?—quite sure?"

"I am certain, sweetheart, that I love you; and that I want you to be my wife. What an unbelieving little thing you are, Ina!"

She trembled violently.

"I shall never forgive myself if I bring sorrow upon you! Oh, Mr. Douglas! if my life is really shadowed, have I a right to let you take my promise?"

"Too late!" said Ran, firmly. "You have given me your promise, and I shall not let you take it back, I can assure you. You belong to me now, Ina; only I'm afraid if Mr. Fortescue is obdurate I cannot claim you for two years."

"My father does not love me," said Ina slowly. "So surely he would be glad to be free of me?"

"Can you remember him?"

"Not in the least. I recollect my old nurse—who brought me here—perfectly; but I have no remembrance of my father."

"And he has never been to see you all the years you have lived at Ravenstone?"

"Never once."

"Can it be possible you know no more of him than that he is rich enough to provide liberally for your maintenance?"

Ina hesitated.

"Mrs. Cameron wrote to him every year. I wrote, too, once, but he never took any notice. Once the banker sent the cheque by a clerk instead of by post. The old gentleman—he had white hair—said he was instructed to see me, and ask if there was anything I wished for. I told him I wanted to see my father, and he said then my father was abroad, that he hardly ever came to England. I asked if he worked very hard, and could never have a little holiday. The old man smiled as though I had made a joke, and declared life was pretty well all holiday for my father. I need never trouble about his working hard. There was no need for him to, since he had plenty of money without earning a penny."

"Then he is well?"

"I suppose so. I have often wanted to see him, and yet I should be terrified at the thought."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

But Mr. Douglas pressed the question.

"I think," said Ina simply, "he hates me."

"My dearest! Why?"

"In all these years he has never sent me a

word of kindness, never made a single inquiry after me. Oh, I grant," as she saw her lover about to interrupt her, "that he has provided for me; but if he is so rich money could be no object. He got rid of all his parental responsibilities by a stroke of his pen once a quarter."

"But Ina, you have probably been much happier and far better cared for with my cousin than if you had led an aimless, wandering life with Mr. Fortescue all these fifteen years?"

"Oh! Mrs. Cameron has been as good to me as if I had been her own child, and I love her dearly; but, Randolph, my father had no proof of this! Don't you see she might have been a cruel, heartless, unprincipled woman! If she had, and had ill-treated me systematically all these years, my father would never have found it out!"

She was right. Mr. Fortescue's plan had been to get rid of his daughter until he wanted her; he had shown not the slightest anxiety how she fared in the meanwhile.

"Dear," said her lover simply, "you have led a lonely life hitherto, but sunshine is coming for you now: my neglected little love shall be the happiest wife in England."

A servant came to call them in to tea. Ran led Ina up the garden path, through the French windows, to where Mrs. Cameron sat behind her pretty melon-shaped silver teapot.

"Cousin Mary," said the young man gaily, "you may leave me to answer Mr. Fortescue's letter, for I have won my darling, and I will not be robbed of her by all the fathers in the world."

Mary Cameron kissed the girl she loved as her own with all a mother's tenderness.

"My dear," she said, gently, "I hope you will be happy, and I feel I can trust you with Randolph. He is a Douglas, and they always had hearts of gold; but how I shall look at you father I can't think."

But her engagement, though only half-an-hour old, seemed to have given Ina Fortescue courage.

"You know," she observed quietly, "if my father wanted to decide my future he should have come to see me. He has never taken any interest in me; what can it matter to him whether I am happy or not?"

Here poor Mrs. Cameron recollected the other side of the question, and the forcible objections of Sir Ralph Douglas, Baronet.

"Oh, dear! Randolph, there's your father too, and I had quite forgotten all about him."

"I will write to him to-night, and, Cousin Mary, can you give me Mr. Fortescue's address?"

"No, I always write to his bankers, Messrs. Melville, in the city. I expect they know it."

"I will call and inquire to-morrow. Hark! who can that be so late as this?"

Ravenstone was a primitive place, and even on a June evening eight o'clock was not thought correct for visits; besides, a carriage stood outside the gate of Violet Cottage, and the knock at the front door had been, as Mrs. Cameron said afterwards, loud enough to wake the dead.

Ina and her lover sat next each other, so it was natural that in her alarm her little hand should glide into his.

Mrs. Cameron went on mechanically pouring out the tea; but her fingers shook with a nervous fear.

Enter the servant.

"A gentleman on business, ma'am. He is in the drawing-room. He would not give me his name, but said he was sure you would remember him."

Randolph offered to go in his cousin's stead, but this she would not permit.

"I daresay it is only a man with a subscription list," said the poor lady, bravely. "They always make out they have come on important business till you actually are in the room."

But the widow felt uneasy. She did not know what she expected, still less what she feared. She turned the handle of the drawing-room door with a jerk, and went in, to see a tall military man pacing up and down the

little room like some wild beast confined in a cage all too small for his restless energy.

"Mrs. Cameron!" he exclaimed. "I should have known you anywhere. The fifteen years which have passed since our last meeting have left no mark on you. I fear I am more changed. Wandering from one place to another tells on a man."

He was changed, but she knew him the moment she saw his eyes. The black hair was still unsilvered. There were one or two lines about the mouth, and the expression, once simply cold and stern, had now something of sarcastic cynicism about it. But still he looked wonderfully young to have a daughter contemplating matrimony; and, in spite of her sympathy with the young lovers, Mrs. Cameron felt a little grateful to her visitor when she remembered that for fifteen years he had sent her the by no means trifling sum of five hundred pounds.

"Mr. Fortescue! Is it possible?"

"Quite possible that I am here. Did you not expect me so soon? But, my dear lady, I am not Mr. Fortescue. Within a day or so of our last meeting I succeeded my brother in the title. It seemed idle pride to ask you to change the inscription on your letters. Besides, I fancied, for my child's sake, I had better keep the matter secret for a while. But I have been Lord Fortescue of Ardleigh Hall these fifteen years!"

Lord Fortescue! She was not a toady. She came herself of good family; witness her cousin Sir Ralph. But yet it was pleasant news to find her visitor was an English peer. Mrs. Cameron was but human; to have a nobleman visiting her in this unceremonious manner was passing sweet.

"Lord Fortescue! And to think I never guessed it. Then my pretty Ina, perhaps, has a title too?"

He shook his head.

"She is the Honourable Ina Fortescue; but there is no other title awaiting her. And now, Mrs. Cameron, may I ask for an account of your charge? You will confess I have not fettered you with many demands or inquisitorial visits. I laid down but three conditions for your guidance. I trust they have been observed."

"You have been kindness itself, my lord; and I love your daughter dearly. I remember the conditions perfectly; and I can say truly Miss Fortescue has never slept a night away from Ravenstone, nor accepted any invitation without my accompanying her since she came here."

"Excellent!" said the peer, gravely. "But there were three conditions. Has the last been carried out? Have you taught Ina she was destined to lead a life apart, and must not expect gaiety and amusement?"

Mrs. Cameron's conscience smote her when she thought of in whose company she had left Ina.

"I tried to," she said, frankly; "but sweet-tempered as she is, your daughter possesses a firm will. As a child she used to remonstrate, and say surely if she never asked you for amusements but, earned them for herself, surely she could have them. As she grew up she often spoke of earning her own living."

"Heaven forbid!"

"I always scorned the idea," declared Mrs. Cameron. "My lord, I will tell you frankly what I regard as the one flaw in your child's character. I have done my utmost to make her feel grateful for the liberal education and comfortable home you provided for her; but I failed entirely to make her appreciate the matter aright. Gentle and yielding in general, Ina yet has no dutiful respect for you. It is not my fault. But she has chosen to resent what she terms your long neglect of her, and I fear at first you will not find her the docile, affectionate daughter you may expect."

"I expect nothing but that from her," said Lord Fortescue, sadly. "She was born the child of sorrow, and until she is in her grave I shall hope for no comfort concerning her. Perhaps, dear madam, it was not fair to im-

pose such a charge on you without giving you my fullest confidence, but, for the child's sake, I was anxious you should be entirely unprejudiced. You may have thought me harsh and unfatherly in my conduct to Ina in the rules I laid down for your guidance respecting her. You may have taken offence even at my letter, since I believe the young gentleman to whose intimacy with my child I objected is a relation of your own."

"A very distant cousin," admitted the widow, "the son and heir of Sir Ralph Douglas. My lord, indeed he is a husband any girl might be proud of, and he simply worships Ina!"

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow!"

"You will not part them?" pleaded Mrs. Cameron. "Indeed, my lord, I had no thought of betraying your confidence. Randolph is nearly thirty, and I looked on Ina as a child; and though you are an English peer I do think Sir Ralph's heir an alliance not unequal for your child!"

"My dear lady," said the peer, with unctious, a suspicious dimness in his eyes, "I am the last man in the world to be ambitious. I know the Douglas family well, and but for one mournful circumstance would gladly welcome Mr. Randolph as a son-in-law; but I should be playing an unworthy part if, with my miserable secret, I suffered the match to go on!"

"Nothing will change his love!" declared Mrs. Cameron. "Even if she were not Miss Fortescue he would be true to her!"

"Not Miss Fortescue! What do you mean?"

"Forgive me, but I knew there was a mystery, and I have fancied sometimes there might have been—by an accident—some flaw in the legality of your marriage. I mean," she reddened with confusion, "that though your daughter, Ina was not your heiress!"

"I understand. I daresay the suspicion was natural, but it was unfounded. I was married with every legal precaution, and Ina is Miss Fortescue of Ardleigh. If anything happened to my boy she would be my heiress!"

"Your boy! I never dreamed Ina had a brother!"

"A half-brother," corrected Lord Fortescue. "I married again three years ago, chiefly that my title might not pass to my poor afflicted Ina—a girl who must never be wife or mother!"

"But why?" persisted Mrs. Cameron. "My lord, I may be stupid, but I cannot understand."

"I will speak plainly then, painful as it may be. My first wife had been some time confined in a lunatic asylum. She quitted it the last time only three months before her child's birth. For generations the disease has been in her family, and the first physicians in mental disorders have assured me Ina has the fatal taint in her blood. Sooner or later she will be a raving maniac!"

CHAPTER II.

LOVERS never complain of the length of time they are left *titte-à-tite*, or it might have occurred to Randolph and Ina that Mrs. Cameron's mysterious visitor was detaining her unconsciously. When at last she came back to them, both were horrified by the aspect of her face.

She looked like someone who has received a terrible shock. Her smile had fled, and there was an expression of troubled sympathy on her face.

"My dear," she spoke to Ina, but she carefully avoided meeting the girl's eyes, "your father is waiting to see you."

"My father!" Ina blushed crimson with excitement at the news. "Is he really come at last?"

"He is in the drawing-room. My dear, do not keep him waiting; you had better go at once."

But Mr. Douglas interposed.

"We will both go to him," he answered, gravely, taking Ina's little hand in his.

"There can be no desire for a private interview between a father and child who have been parted for fifteen years. It is better that Mr. Fortescue should understand that Ina has promised herself to me."

"I have told him, Randolph," said poor Mrs. Cameron; "and he has convinced me that it can never be. Oh, what have I said? My poor children! My darling Ina! But indeed you must forget each other. Lord Fortescue will not hear of your engagement!"

"Lord Fortescue of Ardleigh!" exclaimed Randolph. "Do you mean that he is Ina's father?"

"Yes."

A curious smile crossed the young man's face, but he said nothing, only held Ina's hand more closely, and opening the door left Mrs. Cameron to her own reflections.

They were not pleasant ones. Good, kind-hearted woman that she was, Mary Cameron reproached herself bitterly for not having guessed the terrible certainty which threatened her charge.

Lord Fortescue had warned her so plainly his daughter was not as other girls, and yet she had suffered her to drift into an attachment which bid fair to blight two lives.

"He can never marry her," thought the widow, sadly. "And the Douglasses are faithful unto death. He will go down to his grave unmarried, and his grand old name will be extinct!"

Lord Fortescue was standing facing the door when the young couple entered.

Any father might have been proud of the fair graceful girl who clung so timidly to her lover's arm. Any man might have been glad to welcome such a son-in-law as Randolph Douglas. But the expression on the peer's face had nothing of pleasure in it.

"I wished to see Miss Fortescue alone," he said, coldly to Mr. Douglas. "I do not understand your intrusion."

"I have business with your lordship I would rather not defer," said Randolph, proudly. "I love your daughter; and I have her promise to be my wife. Since you have neglected her utterly from infancy, I deny that you have any moral claim to decide her future, but I am well aware the law requires your sanction to our union until she is of age. I am here, Lord Fortescue, to ask you for your daughter. My name and position are well known to you, since my father's estate and Ardleigh join; in years gone by we and the last Lord Fortescue were sworn friends and comrades. I little dreamed when I met Ina that she was the niece of one my father regarded as a brother."

"I thank you for the honour you offer my child," said Lord Fortescue, slowly; "but I beg unhesitatingly to decline your proposal. I shall never consent to your marrying my daughter."

"You overrate your power," returned Randolph, coldly. "For two years, I grant, it rests with you to part us; but when once she is of age not all the fathers in the world can prevent Ina from becoming my wife!"

Lord Fortescue smiled sadly, as though he would not be angry, however much provoked. He turned to Ina,—

"Your admirable guardian has given orders for your things to be packed at once. I propose to leave for London by the last train. It starts in an hour's time. If you have any last preparations to make you had better attend to them at once."

She looked at her lover. He understood the mute appeal, and took her hand lovingly in his own.

"It is only for a little time, my darling. If only you will be true to me this miserable separation will soon pass, and I can claim you before all the world."

"You will write to me?" pleaded Ina.

"If he does," observed Lord Fortescue, "I shall make it my business to see you do not receive his letters. Do you think I am going to be defied by my own child, rebellious girl?"

Her eyes flashed. She had plenty of spirit, in spite of her gentle nature.

"I owe you no respect—no obedience! What have you ever done for me all these years? What claim have you on me?"

"You talk folly," said Fortescue, roughly. "Go to Mrs. Cameron. She will teach you your duty."

The two men were left alone.

It was a strange position. Equals in point of family, their homes actually adjoining, it was yet their first actual meeting.

Fortescue looked younger than his age, and might have taken anywhere under forty.

Randolph, on the contrary, seemed older than his years, and so you would have taken the two more for rivals in love than a passionate suitor and the stern father of his choice.

"My lord," said Randolph, stiffly, "I await your explanation. You owe it to me to state your objections."

"And if I refuse?"

"For your own credit's sake you will hardly do so. The whole world knows my position and prospects. In pecuniary considerations I am a fair match for your daughter. There has always been a friendly intimacy between our families, and I defy you to point out any blot on my past life that justifies you in refusing me Ina."

"I don't refuse her to you personally," said Fortescue, hurriedly. "Were you a Duke my answer would be the same. I do not intend the girl to marry."

"This is nonsense."

"Ask Mrs. Cameron," suggested Lord Fortescue. "I have given her my motives, and she approves them."

"Impossible."

The peer shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask her. I can say no more. It is my belief when you have listened to your worthy cousin you will be completely of my opinion regarding Ina."

"Will you answer me one question, Lord Fortescue? Are you sending me away on the chance of a nobler son-in-law?"

"On my word, no! My one desire for Ina, and has been for years, is that she should never marry!"

The door opened and Ina entered, dressed in a travelling costume of soft grey; a velvet hat of the same shade rested on her fair hair; her eyes were red with crying, and Mrs. Cameron, who came with her, had much ado to restrain her sobs.

"I shall miss her so terribly," said the widow, sadly. "You see she has been like my own child these fifteen years."

"Don't cry," whispered Ina. "I shall come back to you, dear. I shall not stay with Lord Fortescue a day after I am my own mistress!"

"Then how do you propose to support yourself, young lady?" demanded her father, sharply; but Ina did not shrink even from that question. The timid girl seemed changed into a heroine.

"I have been carefully educated," she said, gravely, "and I imagine others will be glad to learn from me. I should not mind how hard I worked so that I was free."

"You will never need to work at all," said Randolph, lovingly. "The day the law makes you your own mistress we will be married."

She gave him one grateful glance from under her long eyelashes; then she looked sadly round the little room where she had spent so many happy years.

"I shall never forget it," she said to Mrs. Cameron, "nor all your goodness to me. As long as I live I shall remember dear Violet Cottage, and my happy childhood, and some day I will come back."

She was gone. It had all happened so quickly. Events had followed each other so rapidly, from Sir Ralph's letter of vexation to Lord Fortescue's abrupt appearance and terrible revelation, that poor Mrs. Cameron was quite overcome. She sank back in a low chair, and looked ready to faint.

Randolph was as kind to her as possible.

He ordered a cup of hot tea, and stood over her while she drank it. He waited till she had grown calmer and more like herself, and then he said gently enough, but in the tone of one who means to be answered,—

"Lord Fortescue referred me to you for an explanation. He said you knew the motives of his conduct about Ina, and approved them!"

"I don't," said Mrs. Cameron, frankly. "I mean I don't approve them. He ought to have told me the truth fifteen years ago—not now, when it is too late."

"Still you will tell it to me?" urged Ran.

"My dear, I can't bear to! It has well-nigh curdled the blood in my veins, for I loved her as my own child, and it will break your heart."

"I think not!" said Ran, simply. "While Ina is well, and while she loves me, nothing else really matters!"

Mrs. Cameron sobbed out the story, bit by bit, and Randolph listened, to her amazement, with a set, impenetrable face.

"I don't believe it!" he said at last.

"Randolph!"

"It is too full and too minute to be true," said Mr. Douglas, slowly. "If that man had been telling you simple facts he would have contented himself with saying his wife died insane, and that there was a chance of Ina inheriting her malady. I fancy, Cousin Mary, had he said this much and no more I might have believed him!"

"But—"

"But he has overdone it," retorted Randolph, "by saying his wife was some time in an asylum, and that for generations and generations insanity had been in the family; also by declaring the first doctors of the day had declared Ina inherited the fatal disease. You know no doctors have seen her since she came to you. You have the old nurse's word that she had the sole charge of Ina from the time she was six months old! Surely this convicts the father of falsehood! He declares he consulted the first specialists of the day, and they declared that Ina must infallibly go mad! Now, Cousin Mary, I don't believe physicians would pronounce such a doom on any creature they had never seen. It is out of the question they would give such a verdict on an infant in arms; and, as we know, since she was six months' old Ina has never been shown to any distinguished practitioner. I think we can laugh at her father's fiction!"

Mrs. Cameron was very far from laughing.

"Such things are hereditary, Ran."

"I know; but as he has lied in one particular he may in another."

"But what could be his object?"

"I don't know," said Randolph, slowly, "but I mean to find out. I shall go home to-morrow and cross-question Sir Ralph."

"He will be as anxious to separate you as Lord Fortescue himself!"

"I think not."

"Remember his letter."

"He did not know that Ina was so dear to me then, nor had he heard her birth. Sir Ralph is a proud man; but even he would be content that I should marry Miss Fortescue of Ardleigh. Strange I never dreamed, when we discussed Ina's story, that she could belong to that family!"

"Does your father know Lord Fortescue?"

"Not this man, but he and the last lord were like brothers. The Fortescues have rather a strange history. There were three brothers—this man is the youngest—and for years no one thought they would ever marry. Lord Fortescue died fifteen years ago; his second brother had been killed a few years before in an accident; so Ina's father came into everything, and for ages it was a marvel to people generally that he did not marry."

"But he had married?" objected Mrs. Cameron.

"He was a widower when he came into the property. You forget that."

"He never owned it. It is only three years

since his marriage was announced to an Italian actress. They have one child—a boy—but they never come near Ardleigh. My father was enraged when he heard of the match, and said it was the first *mésalliance* in the Fortescue family."

Mrs. Cameron looked bewildered.

"Then who was Ina's mother?"

Mr. Douglas shook his head.

"I have no idea; but I am almost certain the marriage must have been kept secret. Now, in such a case, he could not have known much of his wife's history. To say madness was in the family for untold generations must be false."

"I can't understand," said poor Mrs. Cameron, quite bewildered. "Lord Fortescue has spent enormous sums on Ina, and provided for her exactly as though she was his daughter, and now you seem to imply she is not."

"You wrong me. I have no hope of proving she is not his child, only there is a mystery somewhere. Why should he want to keep her unmarried? Why should he invent (I feel sure it is an invention) such a cruel libel about her mother? What has he to gain? Depend upon it there is something heavy at stake!"

Mrs. Cameron shook her head.

"On the contrary, he would gain if she married you. Her wants would never cost him another shilling, and would not interfere with his second family." Then, after a pause, "No, Randolph, it is terribly sad, and I can't bear to think of it; but I fear the story is true, and that fearful doom really threatens our poor Ina."

"I have no patience with you!" cried Randolph. "Did she ever show a sign of it? Did you ever meet a quieter, calmer creature? Did you ever before associate clear serene grey eyes with mania? Was her conduct to-night, under a sudden and overwhelming shock, what you would expect from a mad woman?"

"No. But—"

"Never mind the buts. Be your own kind self, Cousin Mary, and don't believe evil of the girl you have reared for all the fathers in the world. You will see Ina Mrs. Douglas yet!"

But, in spite of the young man's anxiety, he could sympathise with the widow's disappointment.

He knew that with Ina she had lost her income, and he asked her, quite kindly and thoughtfully, what she intended to do.

Mrs. Cameron replied she had expected Ina's recall for a long time, and had been saving to provide for the calamity.

Violet Cottage and its furniture were her own—all that her husband had been able to leave her. She had carefully put by a quarter of her income ever since Ina came to her.

This safely invested in railway stock produced over a hundred a-year; so though it would be in a far humbler style than she had of late been used to, she hoped to be able to continue in her present house.

"I should like to stay at the Cottage," she said, when Ran pressed her to come to his father's, at any rate, on a long visit. "You and I don't think alike about Lord Fortescue, Ran; but we both love Ina, and for her sake I would rather stay here."

"For Ina's sake?" repeated Mr. Douglas.

"Why?"

"I don't think she will be happy with her father," said Mrs. Cameron, slowly. "And, gentle as she seems, she has a very strong will. I know she loves me, and I believe, Randolph, if anything drove her to leave her father, she would come straight back to me."

"Do you think he would be unkind to her?"

The widow hesitated.

"I never did believe in stepmothers, Randolph. The new wife may be quite a girl herself, and grudge Ina her place in the home. Besides, no doubt Lord Fortescue is wrapped up in his second family, and Ina is sensitive. After being my first object all these years, it would come hard on the child to feel she was one too many."

"I wish she would come back," said Ran, gravely. "Cousin Mary, I know you won't

like to hear it, but I think I hate Lord Fortescue. He looked to me a man capable of any evil!"

Mr. Douglas was home in time for dinner the next day. His father greeted him warmly, but asked no questions. It was only when the cloth was removed, and the servants had left the two alone over their dessert that Sir Ralph said, gravely,—

"You are home very suddenly, my boy?"

"I came to ask your help, sir," said Randolph, frankly. "I want to be married, and everything seems against me."

"Not to your cousin's adopted child?"

"To Lord Fortescue's only daughter, who has been under Mary's charge for years."

Sir Ralph looked disturbed.

"I always thought he married that girl. He denied it hard and fast at the time though."

"Who?"

"She was an officer's daughter of good family, but poor enough to have to earn her own bread twenty years ago. She was governess at the Rectory, and she suddenly disappeared. It was an open secret that Lord Fortescue—my old friend and comrade—had proposed to her, and been refused. Mrs. Allen, the rector's wife, called him into her parlour; he spent money like water in the search, but no clue was ever found. Your mother had loved the girl dearly, though she had only known her a few months, and positively refused to believe evil of her; but the mystery was never solved. Poor Fortescue himself taxed Noel with it. He was a handsome fellow, and had been intimate with the Allens, but he declared he was far too poor to marry anyone but an heiress."

"And you think she was the present lord's first wife, and the mother of my Ina?"

Sir Ralph nodded his head.

"Margaret Trevor was a beautiful girl, and, I believe, a good one. She left the Rectory with her lover, and I for one shall never believe she was not his wife. I suspected Noel Fortescue at the time. When he came into the title and yet kept single all these years I felt certain of it."

Randolph told his story. He kept back nothing. He poured out his wrongs, his Ina's charms, and Lord Fortescue's cruelty. Sir Ralph looked bewildered.

"I can't make it out. I never liked Noel Fortescue. There was something underhand about him; but I don't see why he should hate his own child enough to invent such cruel lies about her. I begin to fear, my boy, we are mistaken, and he married someone who was really insane."

"Miss Trevor was not so, you are sure of that?"

The Baronet almost smiled.

"She was the only child of a brave officer whose family were famous for their courage. Besides, her whole life could be accounted for. From eight to eighteen she was at a school for officers' daughters; she came straight from there to be Mrs. Allen's governess."

"And when did she leave?"

"In the summer of 'sixty-four.' June, I think."

"And Ina was born in April of 'sixty-five.'"

Sir Ralph looked troubled.

"I can't see the motive, Randolph. I don't want to take Fortescue's part, but men don't sin like that without a motive. If he married Margaret Trevor there is no reason for his wanting to bring upon an awful charge against her memory. The Fortescue estates are so strictly entailed that everything must go to his son. It would be far more to his advantage to see the girl well married than have to save a scanty provision for her."

"Can you describe Miss Trevor?"

"I never was good at describing people, but if you go to the Rectory, Mrs. Allen has a picture of her. One of their friends was fond of drawing, and he painted Margaret as a present to his hostess. It does not do her justice, but it will show you the style of woman that she was—the very least likely to go out of her mind."

"And then? I mean when I have satisfied myself—as I feel sure I shall—that Miss Trevor became Fortescue's wife and Ina's mother, what am I to do next?"

"You can do nothing until she is of age."

"I must!" said Ran, breathlessly. "Sir, do you think, if I knew he has forged such a cruel charge, I can be content to leave my darling in his keeping? He must have some powerful object to gain by making people believe her mad."

"He can't have!" declared Sir Ralph. "I tell you he came into immense wealth on his brother's death. My poor old friend left everything to go with the title, believing his favourite brother Garnet would succeed him,—as brave a soldier as ever donned a uniform. Garnet unhappily had died a few years before, and Fortescue always forgot to alter his will. Why, the funded property alone must have been immense. Even if through her mother (though Margaret Trevor had no rich relations) his daughter had come into a fortune, to keep it in his hands could be no inducement to him. Why, the man is a millionaire!"

"Have you ever seen Lady Fortescue?"

"I called," said Sir Ralph, slowly. "I felt bound to do that much. She is a lovely creature, but quite beneath him in rank. I should imagine her to have been about the class of a ballet-dancer before he married her. As to an actress, that's nonsense! She hasn't the education! She may have walked on the stage to make up a crowd, but acted, never! She's not got the brains!"

"I suppose he is very fond of her?"

"Worships her apparently, but it's an awful come down for the Fortescues. She'll never be able to hold her own in the county."

"Do you think she will be kind to Ina?"

"I should not like to say. She looked to me to have a temper, but she's devoted to her own child. They were only there a week, and then went on to Ellerslie, a new place he's bought in Yorkshire."

Mr. Douglas paid his visit at the Rectory, and took the sweet silver-haired mistress of the ivy-covered house into his confidence. Mrs. Allen had never forgotten the sweet-faced girl who, for a few months had been like an elder daughter to her.

Randolph at first gave no explanation, only said he much wished to see Miss Trevor's picture, as in his travels he believed he had met with her child.

Mrs. Allen produced the painting, a little faded, a little old-fashioned, but still distinct enough for the lover to recognise a speaking likeness to Ina.

"Heaven bless you, dear Mrs. Allen," he said warmly. "You have solved my doubts. It is her very self!"

The old lady started.

"Do you really mean Margaret left a daughter, and that you have seen her?"

"I mean," said Randolph, smiling, "I have lost my heart to a creature who might have sat for this picture, and when I bring her home you will think you see Miss Trevor again."

"Her name!" cried Mrs. Allen. "Oh, do tell me who she is! I assure you the mystery of Margaret's fate has been a trial to me for years."

"Her name is Ina Fortescue!"

Mrs. Allen's face changed.

"Then she is not Margaret's daughter."

"My father felt sure she was. He said the present Lord Fortescue was a frequent visitor here, and an open admirer of your lovely friend."

"The three brothers visited here, and they all admired Margaret. The Captain came very seldom, for he lived mostly with his regiment in London. From the first I saw it only rested with Margaret to be Lady Fortescue. When she refused I asked her reason, and taxed her with preferring handsome Noel to his noble, generous brother. I shall never forget her reply. The tears came down her cheeks as she took my hand and assured me that come what might she would never marry

Noel Fortescue. She hated and feared him, she said, too much for that."

"Are you sure she was in earnest?"

"I am positive. Sir Ralph and I always differed about this. He declares Noel Fortescue was the cause of Margaret leaving me. I know the poor child hated him. Why, I have seen her tremble all over at his bare approach. She feared him as an enemy."

It was then Randolph confided his story—his love for Ina, her lonely childhood and neglected youth, the strange return of her father, his point-blank refusal to the marriage, his cruel tale of her mother's insanity.

Mrs. Allen listened spell-bound; but she did not seem in the least converted to Randolph's theory.

"I would believe any evil of Noel Fortescue. It is not exactly the right sentiment for a clergyman's wife, Mr. Douglas; but I think him capable of any crime!"

Randolph sighed.

"He seems to have no love for his child, therefore one would have thought he might have been glad to be free from all care of her; but she has Margaret Trevor's face. Tell you this picture could pass as her likeness, and yet you, who know the lady well, declare she hated Noel Fortescue, and would never be his wife."

"She never was his wife!" said Mrs. Allen, firmly. "Of that I am quite convinced; but what proof have you that he is your Ina's father?"

Randolph stared.

"He says so. I never thought of doubt!"

"I doubt it very much!" said Mrs. Allen, calmly. "If she is Margaret Trevor's child Lord Fortescue is not her father. On that point you may be certain!"

"But how can I find out whether she is his child?"

"It will be a very weary task," said his friend, gravely, "and will cost a good deal of money. I see nothing for it but to employ a detective to find the certificate of Noel Fortescue's marriage."

"And then?"

"Meanwhile, yourself search out the fate of Margaret Trevor. She left us in June, twenty years ago; so I fear the clue will be hard to find."

"And you never heard from her?"

"Only once. Three months later I had a letter from her, urging me not to think her ungrateful. She was well and happy. Her husband was the noblest man I ever met, and when she could explain their reasons for secrecy she was sure that we should understand and approve of them. You see, Mr. Douglas, that settles the question. She knew I disliked Noel Fortescue—that nothing in the world would make me approve of her marrying him. Then the wording of the note seems to imply I knew her husband. The Rector and I used to go over all the people who had visited here; but we never could hit on one who would have needed to use such secrecy in marrying Margaret."

"You think," said Randolph, slowly, "the certificate of Noel Fortescue's marriage will prove Margaret Trevor was not his wife. How, then, shall I account for her marvellous resemblance to this picture?"

Mrs. Allen smiled anxiously.

"Find the certificate of his marriage first—it probably took place sometime in 'sixty-six. When you bring me that I will give you my opinion."

But the stress she laid on the *when* gave Mr. Douglas the impression she thought he would find the search both long and difficult.

CHAPTER III.

Often and often had Ina pictured her first long journey. Again and again she entreated Mrs. Cameron to write and get her father's permission to take her to London or the seaside.

The girl had eagerly mapped out the scene.

The packing up, the delightful bustle and novelty, the charm of waking up in some other apartment than her pretty little dimity-hung room at Violet Cottage, and now the reality had come. She was actually off on her travels, and she would gladly have bargained never to wish to leave Ravenstone if only she could have been back at her dearly-loved home with her kind, adopted mother.

It seemed like a dream. A dark, foreign-looking man—evidently a valet—met them at the station, and took all trouble off their hands. A compartment had been reserved, and when the train came up Ina was conducted to it.

Her father sat opposite her. Karl, the valet, handed in quite a sheaf of papers, a basket of fruit, a bag of cakes, and other trifles. Another moment, and they were off, the smooth-faced domestic informing his master they were due in London at five o'clock.

The journey passed without much incident, and finally Ina found herself installed in her new home with her foreign stepmother at Ellerslie. No society was kept, and she would have been utterly miserable but for the society of an old nurse, Janet, who had known her mother.

Ina started to her feet when Janet told her this, and seized the woman's hand, and kissed it.

"My mother! my dear, dead mother, whom I have never heard of! Oh, Janet, only tell me something about her, and I will bless you."

"There's little enough to tell, Miss Ina. She was just like you, only—if you won't be offended—brighter and prettier. She was a mere child when she married, and she died at twenty."

Ina looked at the servant imploringly.

"And my father loved her?"

"Her husband just worshipped her, Miss Ina. He loved the very ground she walked on."

"And yet he hates me!" murmured Ina. "Strange he should have idolized his wife, and yet not have one kind feeling for her child!"

Perhaps Janet thought she had said too much, for she changed the subject abruptly.

"Do you know who's coming to-night, Miss Ina?"

"Lady Fortescue's uncle."

"Yes, the Signor Gabrielli, as they call him. He's a celebrated doctor in his own country. Educated himself, for he was but the son of a peasant, and made himself a name. I didn't mean to like you, Miss Ina; but, somehow, you remind me of your mother, so I can't help giving you one word of warning—beware of Gabrielli."

Ina started.

"But why?"

The nurse shook her head mysteriously.

"I can say no more. Just those few words are enough to lose me my place—beware of Gabrielli."

It seemed very strange, and when Ina was presented to the guest that evening she was even more bewildered.

The Italian doctor was an old man with silvery hair and a long beard, which gave him almost a patriarchal aspect. He spoke English fluently (there were people unkind enough to say he had learned the language by working as a boy in an Italian restaurant in the Strand, where he earned enough to pursue his medical studies). He was undeniably clever, his face told that; but there was a glimmer in his dark eyes keen observers did not like; and more than one of his English confidants had declared that, with all his talents and learning, there was one thing Gabrielli could never teach himself—how to be a gentleman.

But to Ina, with her nineteen years, her reverence for old age, and her delight at hearing kind words in her own language, the Signor seemed a very kind, fatherly old man.

Janet must have been mistaken in telling her to beware of him. Why, she almost loved him dearly; and had he been Lady Fortescue's

father would willingly have given him the affectionate title of grandpapa.

He sat next her at dinner, and talked to her a great deal. When they joined the ladies in the drawing-room he went straight to her side, his niece not seeming at all jealous.

Ina did not understand the warm interest the Signor was pleased to take in her, nor his curiosity as to her life in England. His kindness she fully appreciated, and when she went to bed that night it was with the opinion life at Ellerslie would be much pleasanter during the doctor's visit.

Poor child!

In the smoking-room Lord Fortescue and his uncle by marriage held a long and eager conversation after the rest of the household had retired. The Signor's face was a trifle less amiable than it had been in the drawing-room, and Lord Fortescue's was undeniably angry.

"Ten thousand pounds is an absurd price," he said at last. "I think you presume on our relationship, Signor."

The Italian smiled sardonically.

"But for the relationship I would not stir a finger in the matter. You don't suppose I want to help you. It is Paulina and her boy I think of. Anyway, that is my last word—ten thousand pounds in gold."

"I call it preposterous."

"Then you are at liberty to refuse it?"

"You know I can't do that. I am in a regular fix. I must get you to help me or someone else."

"Who may betray you to the other side?"

"After all," said Fortescue, slowly, "I believe I could defy discovery. Supposing I relented, and enacted the part of amiable father?"

"Too late."

"How so?"

"The young man's suspicions are aroused. I had it from a secret agent of my own. Mr. Douglas is now in London seeking a detective clever enough to hunt up the certificate of your marriage with Ina's mother."

"It will need a very clever detective."

The doctor laughed.

"Unquestionably; but that does not lessen the danger to yourself. I tell you plainly, you have made a great mistake. It was a false move altogether, proclaiming yourself to those people as Fortescue of Ardleigh."

"I was so taken by surprise I—"

"Precisely. Well, it's no use to talk over past mistakes. The future is enough to occupy you."

"Rather too much."

"Not at all. It's simple to a degree. Ten thousand down and safety secured, or—ruin!"

"You think, then—"

"I think, with my help," suggested the wily doctor, "Mr. Randolph Douglas will be able to discover something a great deal more useful to him than the certificate he is seeking."

"Surely you would not betray me?"

"I must think of Paulina and her boy. I have no children, and my niece is dear to me. If you refuse my conditions I shall go to the other side. Whatever they pay me will go to form a little provision for my injured darlings."

"Gabrielli, I think you are fiend!"

The doctor smiled.

"I am not a fool, my friend. You have told me your secrets to please yourself; I intend to use them for my own advantage."

"Ten thousand pounds! And you are sure it could be managed."

"I am positive of it. Money down, and no questions asked."

Ten minutes of breathless silence. Lord Fortescue paced the room like some wild beast.

He stopped his frantic walk abruptly in front of the doctor.

"You shall have the money to-morrow. Only, remember, whatever you do I desire to know nothing—nothing at all."

"I shall respect your fatherly scruples."

You may leave everything to me in perfect security. And now, my worthy nephew, as I have much to think of and arrange, and as it is getting late, I will wish you good-night."

He was gone.

Lord Fortescue buried his face in his hands and trembled.

He was not a good man. He had already broken his promise to the dead, and cruelly wronged the living; but even he shrank in horror from the step just taken. If those who loved Ina could only have dreamed of the fate in store for her the morning's light would have found them at Ellerslie, no matter at what cost.

CHAPTER IV., AND LAST.

RANDOLPH DOUGLAS went to London on his self-imposed task full of hope and confidence. He knew the exact date of Ina's birth, and had always understood her mother died within a year of her marriage. Thus he knew the year, and well-nigh the month, of the ceremony; and it seemed to him it must be easy to find the certificate, able as he was to offer a tempting reward for it. His father's advice had been short and to the point.

"Don't appear in it yourself, my boy. I know Noel Fortescue of old, and he's as deep as any man yet born. If you stir in the search he will divine your motive, and do his best to baffle you."

So Mr. Douglas went straight to the family lawyers, backed with a note from Sir Ralph, begging them to recommend him some acute detective to make some important inquiries for a friend.

Mr. Drummond, the head of the firm, who had known Randolph all his life, told him a certain Silas Gee would suit him in all respects, and hoped, in a kindly way, no trouble threatened his friend.

Impelled to confidence, Randolph answered simply that he was engaged to be married, and he desired to trace out his betrothed's parentage on her mother's side.

Mr. Drummond smiled.

"The father's is usually thought more important."

"There is no difficulty there. She is the daughter of Lord Fortescue of Ardleigh, but he objects strongly to her marrying me or anyone else."

Mr. Drummond looked inscrutable.

"A clever man Lord Fortescue."

"Do you know him?"

"Only as far as having had to settle his debts in his younger days by his late brother's orders. I wonder at his objecting to such a suitor as you, Mr. Douglas!"

Randolph told his story. The lawyer listened with great attention and shook his head.

"Gee will find you the certificate if it's to be had, Mr. Douglas. But I doubt the marriage."

Randolph flushed.

"Do you mean Miss Trevor?"

"I saw her once when I was staying with your father," said Mr. Drummond; "and I would not speak a word against her. But I don't believe she ever married Noel Fortescue. Why, sir, she hated him. It was impossible for anyone who saw them together to doubt it. No, Mr. Douglas; Lord Fortescue may have deluded you by declaring his first wife died mad; but depend upon it that wife was not Margaret Trevor."

Mr. Silas Gee called on Randolph and duly received his instructions. He seemed a shrewd man of business, and declared there was no difficulty in the matter. But still days passed on, and he had nothing to report.

Randolph began to grow crestfallen. Rewards had been offered far and near for the missing certificate; advertisements had been inserted in all the papers for proofs of the marriage of Margaret Trevor, the ceremony taking place some time in 'sixty-five.

But no answer came, and Randolph was beginning to lose hope—when more than a month after his leaving Violet Cottage—he received a peculiar note from Mr. Gee.

"On the scent at last. Will be with you to-morrow at five."

The hours of "to-morrow" dragged painfully to Randolph till five o'clock came; then he heard the detective's familiar knock, and was surprised, on saying "come in," to see enter not only the stout, comfortable form of Mr. Gee himself, but a female figure closely veiled.

"This lady," began the detective, affably, "declines to give me any assistance unless I can assure her why you require the information. She claims to have been at Miss Ina's marriage, and to have closed her eyes."

"I was with her throughout her married life," said the woman, quietly; "and, but for my being taken in by a villain, I should have had the care of her child. I was very fond of Margaret Trevor, though I was only her servant. I've done her child harm enough already, and I don't mean to do her any more. So, young man, unless you tell me plainly why you want information about Miss Trevor's marriage, you'll get none from me."

She paused to take breath.

Randolph looked at her closely.

A more unprepossessing person it would have been hard to find, but she bore his scrutiny unmoved.

"I want to discover the certificate of Miss Trevor's marriage, because I believe she was the mother of my future wife."

"I think you're mistaken," said the woman, coolly. "She had only one daughter, and from all I hear, poor girl!—she won't have a chance of marrying anyone."

"Are you alluding to Ina Fortescue?"

"And if I am?"

"She is my betrothed wife. Lord Fortescue has only separated us for a time. So soon as she is of age we shall be married."

The woman looked at him keenly.

"My lord refused his consent, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"On what plea?"

"That her mother died insane."

The woman uttered a cry of horror.

"I knew he was a villain," she said, bitterly. "He would injure the living cruelly to gain his ends; but I never thought he would tell cruel lies of the dead. Well, he should have trusted me entirely, and then maybe I'd have been true to him. I shall not give you the certificate to-night, young man. I've a copy of it at home which I got years ago in case such a thing were needed. I'll give you a piece of advice instead. Leave off troubling about Ina Fortescue's mother, and think of her."

"You are speaking wildly," cried Randolph. "Heaven knows I think of her day and night; but what power have I to remove her from her father's care?"

"She is not with her father."

Mr. Douglas started.

"Where is she?"

"Dead, perhaps," said the woman, slowly. "It is nearly three weeks since she was taken away from Ellerslie."

White as death had grown the young lover's face.

"As you are a woman, be merciful," he pleaded. "Think of what she is to me!"

"If you care for her take my advice. Don't trouble yourself about certificates; find your fiancée and marry her!"

Randolph turned to the speaker with imploring eyes.

"Where is she?"

"How do I know? I tried to warn her, but she was such a child she would not see."

"For Heaven sake speak plainly!"

"It is libel if it's overheard," she said, slowly. "But you look true, and I'll trust you. Ina Fortescue's life stood between a bad man and vast wealth. He had not stuck at much. Do you think he would let a slip of a

girl keep him out of a noble property? Not he, I tell you!"

Randolph's blood ran cold.

"You think she is in danger?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Have you ever heard of the Signor Gabrielli, an Italian doctor?"

Douglas shook his head, but Gee's face brightened.

"Private asylum near Naples," he said, intelligently. "Man of great abilities. Has a wonderful knack of relieving families of encumbrances. No questions asked. Profound secrecy, and a living death behind the stone walls of his asylum. That's his plan. Why, sir," and he turned to Douglas, "if anyone has an interest in getting rid of your young lady she should never have been allowed within arms' length of Gabrielli."

"He is a bachelor," said Douglas's strange visitor; "and after his profession he cares more for his niece than anything on earth. That niece is Lord Fortescue's wife."

Randolph shuddered.

"What am I to do?"

The detective was ready with his answer.

"We'd better leave the search here and go to Italy; but it's a forlorn hope. Gabrielli has a deal of influence, and has accumulated an immense fortune. He's almost as powerful as the law itself in the little village where he lives."

"You find her," said the woman, in a more feeling tone than she had yet spoken, "and claim her as an English subject! That's your course if you go openly to work, but I tell you it's dangerous."

Silas Gee shook his head.

"That won't do. You say Lord Fortescue stands to gain a great deal by his daughter's death? It sounds incredible, but I suppose you mean it?"

"He will gain safety, wealth and honour."

"Then," said Gee, slowly, "it will never do to alarm Gabrielli. There are so many ways in which he might procure freedom for his nephew by marriage. No, Mr. Douglas, we must have recourse to one of two things—bribery or stealth."

"Only let us set out!" cried Randolph, with feverish anxiety. "My good woman, you must let me reward you. You have done better for us than if you had brought the certificate!"

The nurse Janet—for she it was—shook her head.

"When you have found Ina Fortescue and married her, send for me. I will give you the certificate then, and take any reward you offer me, but I won't touch money till I know she is safe. I have wronged her badly enough, but I never dreamed her life would be in danger."

Mr. Gee had been a good deal abroad in the course of his professional career, and as an artist Randolph had paid several visits to Italy. He spoke the language well, so that the two strangely-assorted companions were spared many of the inconveniences that often assail Englishmen travelling in foreign lands.

The detective was urgent upon one point. They must both adopt a disguise before they started.

"Bless you, sir, Silas Gee's too well known not to be identified, even in Italy, and you yourself. Depend upon it, if her pa's really entrusted your young lady to Signor Gabrielli, he's given a pretty correct description of you, and told him to beware of you."

The result of this was that the two gentlemen who soon after their conversation reached Naples bore little resemblance to the pair who listened to Janet's strange tidings. The travellers were apparently father and son; the former with white hair and beard, bent form, and feeble style, seemingly a little deficient in intellect; the latter, a dashing young officer, dark enough for a Spaniard, with very fine black beard and moustache—a distinguished individual, who looked down on his infirm old parent.

They put up at the first hotel in Naples,

and gave their names as the Senors Alvarez, hailing from Madrid. The two accidentally got into conversation with a doctor staying at the hotel, and inquired from him particulars of Gabrielli's noted institution. The doctor lauded it to the skies as the most suitable retreat for all afflicted persons—from the helpless imbecile or creature whose mind was enfeebled by old age, to the most violent maniac. He obligingly gave the Spaniards one of his own cards, and declared that Senor Alvarez would receive every consideration from his distinguished friend Gabrielli.

It would have astonished him but a little could he have heard the conversation between the two strangers that night.

"I shall ask to see the patients," said Douglas, sadly, "but what good will it do? Even if she is there, how can I rescue her, when we have that woman's fearful warning to bear in mind—that to alarm Gabrielli might be to endanger my darling's life!"

Silas Gee took the matter much more hopefully.

"Cheer up, sir," he said, quietly. "Faint heart never won fair lady. You've got what unlocks most doors—wealth; don't tell me that in all this Gabrielli's establishment there's not some person who's to be bribed! Once you feel sure the young lady's there, the rest's easy."

"I wish I thought so."

"If worst comes to worst," said Gee, equably, "you can immure me as a patient. I shall charge you a little extra, but that you won't object to. Then once within the walls I shall learn all the secrets, and it will go hard with me if I can't release Miss Fortescue!"

Douglas shuddered.

"I don't know what I hope or fear. It will be terrible to find her there, yet if she is not at Gabrielli's she may be at some other place of the same kind to which we have no clue. My Ina, my fair-haired child, confined among lunatics—it is too awful!"

It was not six weeks since he parted from his darling, but the long suspense, and the terrible fears excited by Janet's suggestions, made it seem like years to poor Randolph; and he was far from sharing the cheerful mood with which Mr. Silas Gee prepared for the long drive to the celebrated asylum.

It was an ideal spot.

The house, enclosed in large grounds, stood among vineyards and olive groves. The scenery around was perfect, but the iron gates, the high walls, told plainly that it was a prison.

The doctor was at home, and the gentlemen were ushered into a large, lofty apartment to wait for him.

Randolph went to the window, which, Italian fashion, opened on to a terrace.

Looking out, he saw some of the patients wandering in the grounds.

His heart-beats quickened, for among those sad prisoners he recognised his darling; but, oh! how changed from the Ina who had been the sunshine of Violet Cottage!

Weeks of bodily sickness would not have given her that hopeless, dejected air. She seemed to him fading away just for want of hope.

He longed to rush to her, and clasp her in his arms.

He had almost started in pursuit, when Silas Gee pulled him abruptly back into the room, for the great doctor had entered.

If Gabrielli looked benevolent abroad, he had an even more benign aspect at home.

It was difficult to credit Janet's hints of his character in sight of his fatherly smile.

Douglas opened the conversation in Italian; then, finding the doctor was an able linguist, begged to continue it in English, lest his father would gather its purport, and take alarm. He said, briefly, the old gentleman was just eccentric enough to be a trouble, and he should be glad to have him safely housed.

Then came a haggling about terms, the Signor demanding just double the lowest sum

he meant to take, and having to come down gradually.

Then the affectionate son desired a day or two to think over matters, and asked to see the establishment and the officials, and to learn the general routine and rules.

Gabrielli was all urbanity. His keepers were of excellent character, he declared, and noted for their even temper and conciliatory bearing towards their afflicted charges.

They were mostly Italians. There was only one Englishwoman, and she was under notice to leave. It was entirely her own doing. She suited him admirably; but the monotony of the place tried her spirits. She had been there but a short time—only six months. She was an immense favourite with the patients, but no increase of salary would persuade her to stay.

"Mrs. Temple is a lady!" volunteered Gabrielli, "which most of my female attendants are not. She was in abject poverty, and the large salary I offered tempted her. I believe now her husband has obtained a good appointment at home, and can support her in comfort. I shall be sorry to lose her, but I can understand her wish to go."

She was presented to the Spanish gentleman in due form—a patient, sweet-faced woman of five or six-and-twenty, with a quiet air of command, yet strangely gentle in voice and gesture.

She stood at Ina Fortescue's side, and Douglas, with a voice he strove to render calm, asked in Italian the particulars of that young lady's case.

The Signor shook his head.

"A sad story. An English girl of rank and fortune. Care quite hopeless. Her delusion is that she had a lover, from whom she was separated against her wish."

Poor Randolph's heart yearned towards her.

She never raised her eyes as he passed. Oh! how it hurt him that he was forced to leave her there!

"Well?"

The two conspirators were alone at their hotel, the door of their sitting-room looked for precaution sake.

Douglas spoke impatiently.

"It will do," said Gee, slowly. "That woman, Mrs. Temple, suspects something; I saw it in her face. She may be leaving for the reason the Signor alleges, but she knows some of the secrets of the prison-house, and the knowledge tortures her. Write to her."

"But what shall I say?"

Gee had no mean intelligence. He took up a pen, and dashed off a few lines,—

"The lover whose *fiancé* is detained in Signor Gabrielli's keeping that others may possess her fortune, implores Mrs. Temple to allow him a chance of speaking to her alone. If she has any pity for a fellow-countryman in great distress, she will make an appointment. Secrecy and respect guaranteed."

The patients' correspondence at Signor Gabrielli's might be under strict surveillance, but evidently no embargo was laid on that of the attendants, for by return of post "Señor Alvarez" received the following note,—

"If you are indeed English I will meet you. I dine with an English clergyman, Mr. Melville, on Sunday. Call there at three, and I will see you. Anyone will tell you his house."

"Melville!" and Randolph started. "Why, we were at college together. What could have brought him here?"

He called that very day. It was, indeed, his old college friend, who was spending some time in Italy on account of his wife's health. He received Randolph warmly, and listened eagerly to his story.

"Gabrielli is the cleverest impostor. He contrives to hoodwink people somehow, but it always makes me shudder to think of the poor creatures in his keeping. I know Hilda Temple well; she was at school with my wife. Though there were years between them Eva never forgets the protecting kindness she can

her by the 'big girl' when she was a tiny child. It is quite true Mrs. Temple was in urgent need of money, or she would never have gone to Gabrielli. Her husband is better off now. In fact, the secret is safe with you. He owed a sum of money, and was in fear of arrest here in Naples; he is rather idle, and was in debt on all hands. Gabrielli, who knows a true woman when he sees one, had an idea Hilda would be invaluable to him, and advanced the sum required to free Temple, on consideration of his wife's services for six months. We were away at the time, or I need not say she should never have so sacrificed herself. Temple is a good fellow enough, but not equal to his wife. She is a gem of the first lustre, and if she helps you your cause is safe!"

Mrs. Temple met the two Englishmen with a frankness which inspired trust, and even without Melville's testimony Douglas would have had confidence in her; but when he spoke of Ina Fortescue her face grew pale.

"She is as sane as you or I!" said Mrs. Temple, sadly, "and she is just eating her heart away."

"She must be free!"

"I doubt if she would welcome freedom. Oh! Mr. Douglas, they have deceived her cruelly. They declare her mother died mad, and that sooner or later she must inherit the malady. Do you know they have so worked on her generosity the poor child actually regards her imprisonment as a blessing, since it frees you from your troth!"

"My life is worthless to me without her!" said Mr. Douglas. "I believe, myself, the whole story about the mother is a fraud invented by her father for his own ends. Mrs. Temple, only help me to free my darling, and I will bless you all my days!"

Hilda looked thoughtful.

"Do you know no escape from Gabrielli's has ever been successful. The risk is terrible?"

"I need not tell you money is no object!"

"Money would be of no avail on any of the attendants. I myself could connive at her leaving the house. We all possess pass-keys; but then, what next? There are spies all around!"

Mrs. Melville, who had listened with breathless interest, interposed.

Will and I are going on a cruise in our yacht next week. Hilda, it seems a wild idea, but if you could but conceal Miss Fortescue's flight for an hour all might be well. You know it is only two miles from Gabrielli's to the coast.

A boat could be there waiting to take her to the yacht. We would set sail with all speed, and surely pursuit would be evaded!"

Hilda Temple looked thoughtful.

"The risk is terrible!" she whispered. "I have seen one attempted fugitive brought back triumphantly to Gabrielli's. Eva, I think it would kill me to see another!"

"Why should it fail?" protested Eva. "A poor creature, trusting to their own powers, might fail; but, remember, I should be waiting in a carriage close to the garden gates, and we would drive at once to the boat; and once on board the yacht do you think we would give her up. Why, Will and I would be torn in pieces first!"

Hilda Temple looked thoughtful.

"You must write to Gabrielli, sir!" she said to Douglas, "arranging for your father to become an inmate of his establishment. Fix an hour for him to meet you at your hotel to settle the last details. At that very hour have a carriage waiting as near as you can approach to the asylum without attracting notice. Arrange with the boatman to wait for you at the creek, and to make all haste to the yacht. I shall not raise the alarm until I think you have gained it. I shall then send messengers to Naples to the Signor, who will be waiting at the hotel, furious at your delay. Of course there is a certain risk, but I do think there is a hope of success."

"And you," said Silas Gee, warmly. "Will suspicion fall on you, madam?"

"My duties will be nominally over, so I hope not. Even if it does I can bear it better than the thought of leaving Ina in such a place. I can assure you the idea of parting from her has been the one dark spot in my blissful hopes of returning to England."

Money is useful in spite of the way some people try to scoff at its powers. The Melvilles were very rich, and their pleasure-yacht was a first-class vessel, quite capable of sailing round the world had such a feat been necessary. They had talked of a cruise for days, so there was nothing extraordinary in their starting rather hurriedly.

Then Señor Alvarez paid his bill in full, and then repaired to his friend's house with his father. Two hours in retirement quite abolished the two Spaniards, and left in their stead the English detective and his young employer. Both these went on board the yacht at Naples—for Mrs. Melville, with a womanly care for Ina's girlish diffidence, decided that she and her husband would be the friends who first greeted her on her escape.

Hilda Temple, who understood how the poor girl's tenderness for her lover had been worked on, told Ina nothing, but that she could not bear to leave her at Gabrielli's, and so some tried friends of her own had offered to take her to England with them, and restore her to Mrs. Cameron's protection.

Ina thanked her with tearful eyes.

"But Randolph," she whispered, "think of him. He will never believe the doom that threatens me, and so my freedom will wreck his life."

"Mrs. Cameron is his own cousin," said Hilda, soothingly. "she will know how to take care of you, and yet not draw him into any marriage that would hurt him."

Oh! the agony of Randolph's suspense! Oh! how he strained his eyes across the water to catch the first sight of the boat which would bring the Melvilles to the yacht! Oh! the rapture with which he saw his girlish love sitting in the stern, her hand looked in Mrs. Melville's!

He remembered Mrs. Temple's warning, that he must not appear to her too suddenly; and so, though every fibre of his heart yearned towards her he went below, and waited with intense anxiety until Will came to him in his cabin with the news that the wind was favourable, and the sails were spread, and all done to ensure their speedy passage.

"She is terribly upset," said the young clergyman, simply. "I have left Eva to soothe her; but, Douglas, take courage. I have seen plenty of people mentally afflicted, and I am sure that girl is as sane as I am."

It was the sixth day after her escape before Ina was well enough to come on deck. It had been deemed best to take a roundabout course so as to elude pursuit if the Signor discovered who had abducted his prisoner, so that they had actually gone no further than the French coast when Ina, a faint colour in her thin cheeks, came towards Randolph on Mrs. Melville's arm.

That lady at once remembered something she had forgotten in the cabin, and went below, and so the lovers met alone.

"My darling!" said Randolph, wistfully, "how you must have suffered!"

She tried to draw away her hand.

"You don't know!—you haven't heard!"

"Dear, I know everything. It is you who have been deceived."

"But my mother?"

"Your mother, dear, was a Miss Trevor, whom both my parents knew and admired. Before I left England, Ina, I saw the woman who had been with your mother throughout her married life, and she declared positively her mistress was as sane as she was. The alderman was invented by Lord Fortescue."

"But why?"

"That I cannot tell you, sweetheart; but I think we shall soon find out. The woman I have mentioned promised me when I brought

you to England she would explain everything. My friend Mr. Melville is now on shore posting letters, summoning her and Mrs. Cameron to meet us at Plymouth."

"Dear Mrs. Cameron! How I long to see her!"

"My father is coming too; and you must love him for my sake. Ina, if you knew all I suffered while your fate was a mystery!"

She shuddered.

"Ellerlie was terrible! I was so afraid of my father; and no one else could speak a word of English, except Nello's nurse, Janet."

Randolph started.

"Was Janet kind to you?"

"I never liked her, but I think she meant to be good to me. She tried to warn me against Signor Gabrielli."

"I fancy, Ina, it is this Janet who gave me the clue. If so, I shall be grateful to her all my days. Only fancy, child, but for her I should never have known what they had done with my darling!"

They reached Plymouth in due time, and found Sir Ralph Douglas and Mrs. Cameron waiting to greet them. The Melvilles would not land; they had left Italy in a great hurry, and were forced to return as soon as they had seen Ina safely in the charge of her old friends.

Sir Ralph kissed his son's choice with all a father's fondness.

"You are your mother's image, my dear!" he said, simply; "and she was as good and true as my own dear wife. Never believe anyone who tells you otherwise."

Sir Ralph had taken rooms for the whole party at an hotel. While Mrs. Cameron was exchanging confidences with Ina the Baronet and his son took a stroll down the quaint old town.

"You must marry her out of hand, my boy. Lord Fortescue is furious. There are rewards for her apprehension in every newspaper. Whatever the man's object is in objecting to the marriage his opposition is very genuine."

"I desire nothing better than to make her my own at once," said Ran, cheerfully; "but has not Janet come? I did not think she would fail me."

Nor did she. They found her waiting at the hotel on their return. She told them frankly she had injured Ina. Years ago she had accepted a heavy bribe from Noel Fortescue to keep silent while he committed a great wrong. She felt no remorse until she was face to face with Ina's fair, sweet girlish grace; then she determined, at any cost, she would come forward and betray him.

She was too late. It was announced at Ellerlie Miss Fortescue was returning to Mrs. Cameron under the escort of Signor Gabrielli.

Even Janet was taken in by the fable. It was not till days afterwards that by listening at doors and other underhand means she learned the truth. She told Randolph enough to put him on the right scent, but she kept back the strangest thing of all—the true motive for Noel Fortescue's insisting to live apart.

"I meant to make terms with you," said the woman, reluctantly, "and sell my secret dear; but when I think of all she's suffered, and how her life itself might have been lost through my taking that man's money years ago to hold my tongue, why, I can't ask for another bribe. I'll tell you the truth just for her sake. You've only to look at this, and you'll understand all that's puzzled you."

"This" was the certificate of a marriage celebrated in June, sixty-five, between Garnet Fortescue, bachelor, and Margaret Trevor, spinster, at old St. Pancras Church, London. It conveyed no meaning to Randolph, but his father grasped the truth at once.

"I see it all. I knew Garnet admired her, but he had seen so little of her I never guessed it could be she who had won her love; and he was so fond of his brother, whom she had

rejected, he would rather hide his happiness than wound Fortescue's feelings."

It was just as Sir Ralph said. Garnet Fortescue, the second brother, had wooed and won Margaret Trevor; but between him and Lord Fortescue (Sir Ralph's old comrade) was a very tender union. Rather than appear as the peer's successful rival he kept his marriage secret. His young wife died at their child's birth. He meant then to make confession, but he put it off; and his death from an accident was too sudden for him to send for Lord Fortescue. To his brother Noel, who was with him, he confided the story and the proofs of his little girl's birth, begging him to take the child to her elder uncle, and beg him to make fitting provision for her.

Most misplaced confidence. Noel saw in the baby a hated rival. Both title and estates were strictly entailed, but could descend in the female line. The tiny child stood between him and immense wealth. He could not bring himself openly to harm her; but he never revealed her existence to his brother, but put her out to nurse as his own child.

Perhaps at the outset he did not mean to really injure her lastingly. Perhaps he thought of calling her his daughter. He only meant to defer her enjoying her inheritance until his own death, when, as his child, she would come in for all of which he had deprived her.

But alas! the secrets of possession were pleasant to him. He grew in time to hate the child he had wronged.

When he married Fanchus Gabrielli, and in time had a son of his own, he conceived the cruel idea of either immuring the orphan in a private asylum, or of helping her out of the world.

So the mystery of Ina Fortescue was clear at last. Sir Ralph himself went down to Ellerlie to summon Noel to disgorge his ill-gotten gains.

But the thief had fled with his wife and child, taking all the available money he could lay his hands upon.

No pursuit was ever made. Ina's friends declared she was rich enough, and that it would be lost labour to prosecute the fugitive.

Garnet Fortescue's marriage was proved beyond dispute, and his daughter's birth.

Gentle Mrs. Cameron was installed at Ardleigh as chaperon and companion to the young heiress, Lady Fortescue.

But she did not bear that title long. Randolph Douglas, who had loved her in the time of her obscurity, and through all her troubles, was slower to urge his suit when he found how vast were her possessions. But Sir Ralph, who understood the girl's loving nature, blamed his son, and told him he was casting a cruel slight on Ina by seeming to doubt her love.

And so, when the Christmas holly decked the village church, the beautiful young heiress gave her hand to the man who won her heart in the glad summertime at Violet Cottage.

The Melvilles came from Italy to grace the ceremony, and be sure that Hilda Temple was not absent. But the bride walked down the aisle on her husband's arm plain Mistress Douglas.

Ina had resolutely refused to bear any title unshared by her husband; and so before her marriage she resigned the Fortescue peerage in favour of her first-born son, or if she died childless in favour of her next-of-kin.

This would have been the uncle who so ill-used her; but we are glad to say there is no chance of Noel Fortescue ever again bearing the title he once usurped, for at this moment there is a long white-robed baby who is already saluted by the villagers of Ardleigh as the young Lord Fortescue, and who, in the eyes of graceful Lady Douglas (Sir Ralph only lived long enough to greet his grandson), is already the most important member of the peerage.

Mrs. Cameron lives at Ardleigh with her adopted daughter, and, in time to come, no doubt will delight that hopeful young noble-

man we have just alluded to with the stories of the perils of Ina Fortescue, and how she was "RESCUED BY LOVE."

[THE END.]

FACTIÆ.

A MINISTER, having some of his old sermons, was asked what he had in his package. "Dried tongue," was the reply.

"Good gracious," said the hen, when she discovered the porcelain egg in her nest, "I shall be a bricklayer next."

MAMMA: "Don't you think, Emma, you are getting a little too old to be playing with the boys so much?" Emma: "I know it; but the older I get the better I like 'em."

"BEFORE we were married," she sobbed, "you would go out with me anywhere." "Well, what of it?" "Now I don't believe you would even go to my funeral." "Ah! wouldn't I, though!"

"DOES your papa object to my presence?" he asked, timidly creeping near his hat, as he fancied he heard a footstep. "No, I don't fancy he will," came the confident answer; "anyhow you can send them along and sorter try him."

"ARE there any vacancies in our school board at present, Mr. Plump?" "Vacancies? Well, I should say there was. You just attend one of their regular discussions, and if you don't make up your mind there isn't one of them but has a vacancy in his upper story, then I'll miss my guess."

AGNES: "Mamma told you that you were not to go to Bessy's house." SALLY: "I know she did, but I couldn't help it." AGNES: "Couldn't help it? why?" SALLY: "Because—because Satan tempted me." AGNES: "Then you should have put Satan behind you." SALLY: "I did—but he pushed me."

MANAGING EDITOR: "Dabbs, that editorial you handed in this morning was a splendid piece of work." Sub-Editor: "I'm glad you like it, but I knew it would be appreciated." Managing Editor: "There's only one thing I want to criticize. In copying it from Darwin, you made 'evolution' 'revolution.' You will please be careful about this in the future."

"Do you keep your books in double entry?" "Yes." "That takes more than one book, don't it?" "Oh yes; several." "Then I don't keep mine that way. I only keep one book!" "Only one book! I don't see how you get along." "It's enough for me." "What book is it?" "My pocket-book. I can always tell by a squint at that exactly how I stand."

"How much will your new school-books cost, Johnny?" asked his father. Johnny calculates to himself, *sotto voce*. "Lemme see: half-a-crown for the single books, three shillings for a new 'rithmetic, four shillings for a geography, two shillings for a ball, three shillings for a new bat, and a shilling for sweets." Then out loud says, "Bout fifteen shillings!"

MISS CLARA: "Can you call the names of the different stars and constellations, Mr. Featherly?" Featherly: "Oh, yes. There is the North Star, and the Evening Star, and the Great Bear, and the Little Dipper, and the Milky Way, and all the rest. Oh, yes." Miss Clara: "The Great Bear is called Ursa Major, is it not?" Featherly: "Oh, you mean do I know their botanical names? I'm ashamed to confess I do not."

"WELL, Ethelinda De Wiggs, I don't see how you could go and engage yourself to that old Simpkins. Why, he hasn't a tooth in his head," exclaimed Miss Wiggs's dearest friend, when she heard of the engagement. "Well, dear," was the reply, "you mustn't be too hard on him on that account; for he was born that way." "Was he? I didn't know that, or I wouldn't have said anything about it," was the sympathetic response.

SOCIETY.

ONE of the principal "points" in the really imposing scene presented by the Grand Hall of the Glasgow Exhibition when Her Majesty entered it, was the famous "Royal Company of Archers," who were stationed, as the Queen's rightful body-guard, on the steps of the throne. Their dress is really picturesque, a rich deep green with sober trimmings, and a single eagle's feather sticking out of the green bonnet—while each archer carries a bow and a sheaf of arrows. The Duke of Buccleugh and the Earl of Stair, Junior Gold Stick and Silver Stick in Waiting, were in command of this body. Standing close behind the throne was an archer holding a velvet cushion, in which lay three golden arrows, according to the ancient custom.

QUITE lately, so it is said, the nurse of the young potentate of the Peninsula (Alphonso XIII.) was informed that very shortly her services would no longer be required; but, preferring her state of semi-splendour, and having conceived a greater affection for the young Monarch than for her own children, she managed to teach the Royal baby to proclaim his determined opposition to her departure. So pronounced are his opinions on the matter, evinced in various ways which mothers will readily understand, that the nurse is to stop, and thus another spoiled child has been added to the list.

Or all men King Christian IX. of Denmark is the most unaffected, and the most easy of access; and when one has been presented to His Majesty, it is more than likely that on the following day, one of the two big dogs which ever accompany him in his diurnal and pedestrian rambles through Copenhagen will run up against you, and that you will hear a cheery, but rather guttural voice wishing you good-morning, and informing you that he intends taking you to the Palace in a day or two. Nobody in Copenhagen thinks of bowing to the King in the streets, as is customary in most countries; to bow to the Sovereign—although of course all those who know him personally salute him; and he lounges about almost unnoticed in the streets of his capital. In most cases, indeed, the approach of the two dogs above mentioned alone give any intimation of the Royal presence.

WILLIAM II. of Germany, says *Modern Society*, is to occupy an apartment in the Quirinal on his visit to Rome, of which the walls are recovered with a magnificent tapestry, which was brought to Italy by Christina of France, the consort of Victor Amadeus I. New and costly furniture is also being put in this and other apartments, and the preparations are all on the same splendid scale. Tapestry is one of the special adornments of the Quirinal; the rooms appropriated to Humbert and Margherita are hung with the famous Gobelines, which were for years mislaid, and were fished out of their obscurity in some corner of the Palace at Turin by the Marquis de Villamarino, not many years ago.

MR. ELLIOT, eldest son of the late Sir Walter Elliot, was recently married to Miss Emily Grace Gethin, youngest daughter of Mr. William St. Lawrence Gethin, at the Cathedral Church of St. Nicholas, Newcastle-on-Tyne. The bride was attired in a dress of rich ivory Duchesse satin, with Court train; the petticoat was covered with beautiful Honiton lace, which, with the bodice trimmings and robings on the train, was the gift of Lady Elliot; the train was finished by a full ruche of tulle, and the edge of the petticoat with a heavy satin ruche; the lace was caught by clusters of orange blossoms; tulle veil reaching to end of train, and orange spray in the hair; the bouquet was the bridegroom's gift; ornaments, pearls, pearl necklace, the gift of Lady Elliot; pearl bracelet, the gift of Dowager Countess of Glasgow, and bangles. The bridesmaids' dresses were white China silk, made with full round draped skirts, and long green sashes.

STATISTICS.

THE City Directory estimates the population of New York to be 1,676,140, while the latest estimates of the Board of Health place it at 1,524,291. It is safe to assume that the population is at least 1,600,000.

M. GERVAIS, a French authority, says there are men capable of bearing arms: in Germany, 5,000,000; in France, 4,500,000; in Austria-Hungary, 1,800,000; in Italy, 2,000,000; in England, 800,000; in Russia, 6,000,000; and all the other European States, 4,000,000. That gives a total of 24,100,000. Of that number, 10,000,000 are trained soldiers.

Or the present very limited number of high stations for making meteorological observations there are only two in Europe which exceed 3,000 meters in height, being about 10,000 and 11,000 feet respectively. Among those in the United States is Pike's Peak, which has an altitude of 14,100 feet, exceeding thus, by more than 3,000 feet, any in Europe. These great heights are much more accessible in America than in Europe, there being five in America where 11,000 feet or more is reached by railroads built for facilitating mining work; the highest of these in North America is Mount Lincoln, in Colorado, the mining works on which are 14,297 feet above the sea, and here is a meteorological station conducted by Harvard College. Another station is placed part way up the mountain, at a height of 13,500 feet. In the Andes range, in Peru, continuous meteorological observations are also carried on, the loftiest point for this purpose being 14,800 feet above the sea.

GEMS.

As fate is inexorable, and not to be moved with tears or reproaches, an excess of sorrow is as foolish as professing laughter; while on the other hand, not to mourn at all is insensibility.

THE reading of romances will always be the favourite amusement of women; the old peruse them to recall what they have experienced; the young to anticipate what they wish to experience.

WHEN classes are exasperated against each other the peace of the world is always kept by striking a new note. Instantly the units part and form a new order, and those who are opposed are now side by side.

A MAN may be a miser of his wealth; he may tie up his talent in a napkin; he may hug himself in his reputation; but he is always generous in his love. Love cannot stay at home; a man cannot keep it to himself. Like light, it is constantly travelling. A man must spend it, must give it away.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LUNCH CAKE.—One quart of flour, two teaspoonsful of baking-powder mixed in dry; beat together half a pound of butter, three-fourths of a pound of sugar, three eggs, one-half pound of currants, one pint of sweet milk flavoured with lemon or spice; mix all together well, and bake immediately.

BROILED TOMATOES.—Select large, firm tomatoes, and do not peel them. Slice half an inch thick, and broil on an oyster gridiron. A few minutes will suffice to cook them. Have ready in a small bowl some hot butter, seasoned with salt and pepper, and a very little sugar, and half a teaspoonful of made mustard. As soon as the tomatoes are cooked dip each piece in this mixture, and lay upon the serving dish. When all are dished, heat to a boil what remains of the butter dressing, and pour over the whole.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THIS life is like a bale of silk on a loom, that winds itself up as fast as it is woven. You do not know what the figure is until it has been taken off and unrolled; then you begin to see what it is. This life weaves; the other life reveals.

THE delights of thought, of truth, of work, and of well-doing will not descend upon us like the dew upon the flower without effort of our own. Labour, perseverance, self-denial, fortitude, watchfulness, are the elements out of which this kind of joy is formed.

IN A GREEK FACTORY.—From the churches our host took us to inspect an olive oil factory, of which there are several in Pyrgi, so that the stream which waters the village is brown with olive juice, like waters tinged by peat in an Irish bog. Here they use no machinery or modern appliances in pressing the oil, merely the old primitive wooden press. Women, or sometimes mules, walk round and round, revolving a wheel which crushes the olives; in this condition they put them into sacks and then into that "black-faced heifer which devours oak-wood," as the Chioties, in their figurative way, are wont to describe their ovens. The sacks are then placed one over the other in the press, and two men turn a post which pulls a rope, which drags a stick, which tightens the press, and the oil oozes into the receptacle prepared for it, with water inside. The oil and water, of course, do not amalgamate, the dregs sink to the bottom, and the pure oil flows into jars prepared for it. It is impossible to realize the affection the people have for olives in a purely olive-growing country. "An olive with a kernel gives a boot to a man," is a true adage with them. It is the principal fattening and sustaining food in a country where hardly any meat is eaten. It takes the place of the potato in Ireland, and on the olive drop depends the welfare of many. An olive yard is presented to the church by way of glebe, and the peasants collect on a stated day to gather these sacred olives, which they buy from the church, and always at the highest market value.

THE CHARM OF NEW ZEALAND.—New Zealand has the very extraordinary property of causing all who have once set foot on her shores to pass beneath the indescribable spell of her witchery. I never met anyone who, having tasted life in his new island home, would consent to change his abode. Switzerland has loftier peaks and fairer towns; Tyrol may boast prettier outlines; Scotland has her classic heather and her brown hillsides; Norway, historic memories that linger in her winding fjords; but having gazed at and fancied myself in love with each of these sirens in turn, I am ever drawn back to my ideal beauty, New Zealand. Nature does not often play the prodigal; to New Zealand she has given all her charms, and keeps them fresh and imperiously beautiful as Cleopatra's. In no other country has she set down towering mountains beside profound fjords, and backed the scene by dense forests sloping down on the other side of the range into fertile pastures. In no other spot does she find so deft a tiring woman as in the climate of New Zealand, who loves to exhibit her mistress in an atmosphere of blue relieved by a carpet of brownish green. I am quite aware that this collocation of colours ought to sound hideous and repulsive in the last degree; but I am certain that those who, like the author of "Erewhon," have lived in New Zealand till they have learned to catch the spirit of her scenery, will bear me out that the effect is passing beautiful. Then, was there ever a land of streams so crystal pure, which challenge you to count every pebble that lies beneath their arrowy current? And is there not an unspeakable charm in finding one's self among a sea of snow or of cloud-capped peaks many unnamed, and most untrodden by man?

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MAY.—We cannot give addresses. You will find what you want in the "Post Office Directory."

PATIENCE.—1. Try a little ether or methylated spirits greatly diluted. 2. Nat brown; very fine texture. 3. Fair.

LAURA.—We must regretfully decline to prophesy as regards the weather, which this year is more than ordinarily fickle.

E. A.—If engaged, yes; if not engaged, no—unless he wishes to put on the golden fetters, and intends soon to be clanking them at his fair captor's feet.

R. H. C.—You were quite right. The word emigrant means simply any person who goes out of the country to another, whether man, woman, or child.

K. L.—It might be in violation of strict etiquette to make the request in question, but under the circumstances stated it would not be absolutely improper.

"DEUTSCHLAND."—The gentleman in England should undoubtedly wait till the lady recognises him in the street before raising his hat, unless a very old friend.

C. E. G.—No doubt your friends will be highly pleased with the sentiments expressed in your poem, but it is not, in our judgment, up to the standard of publication.

F. P.—Your views are correct; and the probability is that the "community" is merely having a little fun at your expense. Get married, and take the consequences.

W. M. T.—You should not hesitate in consulting your wife on business affairs. You could not select a better counsellor—one who is more deeply interested in your welfare.

IRENE.—1. You had better not tamper with them. The scars left would be more unsightly than the things themselves. 2. The simplest and best dentifrice is prepared chalk.

G. T. M.—There are nine navy yards in the United States, situated at Brooklyn, Charlestown, Gosport, Kittery, League Island, Mare Island, New London (un-finished), Pensacola, and Washington.

L. M.—You can only wait for age to cure it. As you grow older, you will grow less self-conscious, and the blood will gradually cease its fiery rush to your cheeks, when a girl comes within your circle of conversation.

DORA.—A girl sixteen years of age is in this country ordinarily considered too young to "keep company," but it is difficult to generalise about such matters. A good deal depends on the character and temperament of the individual in question, and what her parents say about it.

K. T. T.—Hoarseness can be removed temporarily by dissolving in the mouth a small piece of borax, about the size of a green pea, or about three-fourths of a grain, and slowly swallowing it. It produces a profuse secretion of saliva, and affords relief. Good for singers or speakers.

SOCIETIES.—Yours is certainly a hard case. We should think that your best plan would be to apply to some of the landed gentry in the neighbourhood who would be able to give you some tuition to do, or correspondence. Clerkships at present are very difficult to obtain, as the market is greatly overstocked.

C. C.—There can be but one opinion as to the reprehensibility of such conduct as you say your friend is guilty of; and you should make it the ground of a rupture in your acquaintance with him. If he practices such despicable deception on two women who have trusted him, he is not capable of an honourable friendship either with man or woman.

D. E.—1. Bulwer Lytton's first novel, "Falkland," was published anonymously, and the authorship of his play of "Richelieu" was not acknowledged by him until it had proved a great success. 2. General Bulwer died while his son Edward was young, and he was brought up by his mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, sole heiress of the Knobworth estates. 3. Edward was the youngest son.

E. A. J.—Angostura bark is the bark of a South American tree, growing on the Orinoco River, and especially on the Caroni, Venezuela. It has a peculiar and disagreeable smell when fresh, and a bitter and slightly aromatic taste. It is sometimes used in medicine as an aromatic tonic. By the natives it is employed to intoxicate fish. In England it is used for the well-known "bitters."

C. B. J.—Benjamin Franklin Butler was born at Deerfield, New Hampshire, U.S., November 5, 1818. At the time of President Lincoln's call for troops in April, 1861, he held the commission of brigadier-general of militia, and on the 17th of that month he marched to Annapolis with the 8th Massachusetts Regiment. It was subsequently that he was transferred to the command of Fortress Monroe.

RONALD.—Lake of Constance is a lake in Central Europe, and forms a common centre in which Switzerland and the territories of Baden, Wurtemberg, Bavaria, and Austria meet. The Rhine enters the lake at Rheinfelden, at its south-east extremity, and leaves it at Stein, at its north-west termination. Lake of Constance is subject to sudden risings, the source of which is unknown. The waters are of a dark-green hue and very clear. It freezes in severe winters only. Steamers ply on the lake between Constance and various points on its shores. Its greatest breadth is about 9 miles; length, 40 miles; greatest depth, 964 feet; height above sea-level, 1,283 feet.

F. B. B.—The nearest of kin of the deceased person is entitled to administer the estate, if there is no valid objection to him or her rendering the appointment improper. The estate can be distributed just as if the heirs or legatees were all adults, and the surrogate may appoint some other person than the father as guardian of the minors, if he is of the opinion that the father is unfit to execute the trust.

M. E.—The effect of velvet is good in absorbing the light and muzzling the shadows. Flush, on the contrary, is thick and ungraceful. All rough materials add to the size and breadth of the figure, and consequently only those with a smooth surface should be chosen by the stout and tall, leaving the others for people who need both breadth and length. Plaids and stripes should be avoided by the tall and stout.

H. C. M.—Your proposal is a very manly one, and your sweetheart ought to appreciate your determination; if she consents to wait till you can send for her, by all means emigrate. You seem to be just the sort of young fellow that is wanted in the colonies. We are told that at present British Columbia and Buenos Ayres, South America, afford specially good opportunities for energetic young men.

G. F. R.—It is said that a piece of lemon bound upon a corn will relieve it in a day or so. It should be renewed night and morning. The free use of lemon-juice and sugar will always relieve a cough. A lemon eaten before breakfast, every day, for a week or two, will entirely prevent that feeling of lassitude peculiar to the approach of spring. These valuable properties of the lemon should be better known.

LOUIS.—Buff leather was a strong soft preparation of bull's or elk's hide, which was worn under mail armour of the middle ages, to deaden the effects of a blow. When the use of armour was given up, buff coats which would turn a broadside cut were often worn in lieu of it. Modern buff leather, of which soldiers' crossbelts and other accoutrements are often made, is for the most part composed of common buckskin.

DOLCE FAR NIENTE.

AROUND ME is the golden summeride,
The dulcet bird-songs, and the scent of flowers;
My thirty spirit drinks the beauty in,
The restful beauty of the halcyon hours.

I look up towards the deep empyrean blue
And feel an inner thrill of pure delight,
The while a radiant day-dream visits me,
And many fancies beautiful and bright.

Unheeded falls my book, as thus I muse;
Before me comes a face, its beauty rare,
And, half unconsciously, I breathe a name
Upon the balmy incense of the air.

As falls the gentle dew upon the flowers,
So doth the dew of happiness impart
Reviving strength; and I am glad,
Because it's summer now within my heart.

N. T. G.

C. J. W.—This is equivalent to asking whether a man should keep his plighted word, or break it whenever his selfishness prompts him to do so. We believe in a man keeping his agreements. And if any moral or personal reasons arise that render it painful for him to do so, he should make the best terms for release he can with the other party. In any event, he has no business to disregard the other party's rights, whether it be a case of love or of business.

ADDIE.—If the supposed young man who has won your affections is really a woman in disguise, you are of course in a painful and absurd dilemma. But the chances are that your roguish young friends are playing upon your simplicity. Girls sometimes like a practical joke as well as boys. Your best course would be to pay no attention to their mischievous tricks. If they find that they cannot annoy you, they will cease their effect to do so, and leave you at peace.

C. T. M.—Transparent show-bills may be cemented to glass windows in the following manner: Very fine white glue or preferably clean parchment chippings boiled in distilled water in glass or enamel until dissolved must be applied very evenly with a soft hair brush to the face of the bill. Then press it on the glass, and in a few minutes the bill will be firmly fixed. Glass may be fixed to glass in this way, and the cement will bear a good deal of dry heat.

J. F. S.—1. Kindly try and remember the title of the story or the name of one of the principal characters. One or two of the kind named have appeared. 2. The writing on either page is quite good enough. 3. You will find the retail selling price from advertisements. For second-hand articles the price, of course, varies with the amount of wear or the immediate necessities of the seller. No fixed rate could be given. 4. Leave your moustache to nature. At your age you cannot expect much. Shaving makes the hair darker, as a rule.

ADA, FLOESIE AND HULDAH.—In future kindly write separate, and in ink. We will strive to answer your letters together, in justice to other correspondents. The 6th April, 1871, fell on Thursday; the 10th of July, 1870, on Wednesday. Ada asks whether it is right to receive a ring from a gentleman to whom she is not engaged. Yes, if her parents know and approve. To Ada's other question we should say, "quite proper." Floesie's queries are best answered by a decided "No." Huldah may certainly give the present as a friend, and should commit the young man's tastes and habits; a cigar case, cane, purse or umbrella, would be suitable.

T. G.—Frederika Bremer, the Swedish novelist, died near Stockholm, December 31, 1865. She began at the age of eight years to write verses, and in 1824 published her first novel, "The Neighbours," which was soon translated into German, French, Dutch, and Russian, and in 1842 into English, by Mary Howitt, who also translated her other works. She visited the United States in 1849. A German edition of her works in thirty volumes was completed in 1864.

W. W. H.—Palm oil is a fatty oil of the consistence of butter, of a rich orange colour, sweetish taste, and odour like that of violets ororris root. It is the product of the fibrous fleshy coat of the drupe or stone fruit of the palm belonging to the tribe of cocconut palms. The same oil is also obtained in Brazil, Cayenne, and the West Indies. In Africa it is eaten as a sort of butter. It is also used as an emollient, and in the manufacture of candles, soap, and axle grease.

C. M.—To make boiled apple custard take six apples, one teaspoonful of flour, five drops of essence of lemon, two eggs, a small piece of butter, half a pint of milk, a quarter pound of sugar. Stew the apples, and when heated beat to a pulp, having added the essence of lemon and some sugar. Let it cool. Then mix the milk, eggs, butter, and flour, and beat all well. Then add the apples. Put all into a pudding-mould, and let it boil one and a-half hours. Serve cold with milk.

M. O. M.—The great London exhibition of 1851 was held in a building of iron and glass 1,851 feet long, 455 feet broad, and 65 feet high, and covered an area of about 13 acres. The glass employed in the structure weighed 400 tons. The number of exhibitors was about 17,000. The exhibition was open 144 days. The entire number of visitors was 6,170,000. The money received for admission amounted to about £2,500,000, and left a balance, after defraying all expenses, of about £700,000.

LOTTIE.—It is extremely difficult to destroy them. French powder seldom has any appreciable effect. Rubbing the cat thoroughly with turpentine three times a day has sometimes been recommended, and is said to lessen the number of the pests, but such a treatment is not pleasant either to the cat or the people of the house. Wormwood placed about the house is said to banish the pest. If the cat is scrubbed five or six times a day in a tub of warm soap suds, and rubbed with camphor, pennyroyal or turpentine, it will be less troubled than before, and the insects may disappear in a few days. The treatment is dangerous, as the cat is liable to lick the camphor, &c., when its fur is drying.

TOM.—We fear you are a simpleton. Supposing your lottery to be fairly conducted, the lucky numbers are so few and the blanks so extremely numerous, that if a man were fool enough to buy a ticket once a month for forty years, he would be almost certain not to draw prizes enough to make good the money spent in tickets. The lot is a relic of barbarism. It is a contrivance by which sharpers get rich upon the hard-earned money of such simple and greedy souls as you appear to be. If you want to be rich, use your wit, such as you have, and your hands, in some useful and honest calling, and stop trying to get something for nothing. As to the stars, they have something better to do than helping you to buy lottery tickets. Astrology and lotteries belong to the past. For a modern man to have anything to do with them proves that he is either very young, or very ignorant, or a rascal by profession.

C. R. G.—A man violates no law human or divine by changing the orthography of his name, or even the entire name itself, so long as he does not misrepresent the facts for the purpose of gaining something by false pretences. There is no legal obstacle to one who is known as Alexander Montgomery changing his name to Peter Brown on a given day of any year of our Lord and calling himself, and all his family after him, by this shorter appellation. The law provides a method by which a person who wishes to put such a change on record in the statutes may effect that object; but this is only to facilitate the searching of titles to property, &c., which might be embarrassed when there is no public recognition of the alteration. There is nothing requiring such a record, nor preventing any one from changing the first, middle, or last names of himself and all his household at a very early hour on any day of the week he may select for this purpose, and insisting that every one shall address him and them by the new title.

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